

TRASEADEN HALL
WHEN GEORGE THE THIRD WAS
KING



WILLIAM GEORGE HAMLEY

KESSINGER LEGACY REPRINTS

TRASEADEN HALL

"WHEN GEORGE THE THIRD WAS KING"

BY

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'GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY,' 'THE HOUSE OF LYB,' ETC.

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TRASEADEN HALL.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

A WARRIOR IN RETIREMENT.

THE library at Traseaden Hall, if not remarkable for the number and rarity of its books and editions, or for bindings, was, like all the rooms and appurtenances of that mansion, exceedingly comfortable. It was so on acquaintance; and it gave to a visitor, on first viewing it, an earnest that it would be so, for it had all the look of an apartment that was meant to be used and enjoyed.

The shelves which were least often disturbed were some which held theological works and sermons (for the library had, not very long ago, belonged to a clergyman). Nevertheless, as the Hall was now inhabited by a very regular and correct family, the sermons were, on some Sundays and holydays, taken from their shelves and read in the household. Then other shelves, which held good though not very modern editions of ancient classical authors, whose fame was abroad in the whole earth, had here a large exemption from molestation. Collections of plays and the racy lines of the older English poets were, perhaps, a little more inquired for (if it be permissible to use, in regard to them, a phrase now almost appropriated to the Stock Exchange). But the works of Pope and Addison,—then spoken of as Mr Pope and Mr Addison,—of Thomson, Swift, and of writers contemporary with them, stood low and obvious

to the search of every thirsty comer. These clearly received a great deal of attention, as did also the despotic volumes of Dr Samuel Johnson, in those days thought to be the most profound of thinkers and the greatest master of forcible yet elegant style that this country had produced. The indiscriminate wealth of 'Rambler,' 'Spectator,' 'Tatler,' and so on, was ranged very close to the great authors who had so largely contributed to their pages. Anson's and Cook's voyages, holding new worlds between their boards, were conspicuous on the same level. But the literature which had the look of being in continual request, which nightly and daily hands seemed to be for ever turning, was that contributed by Fielding, Smollett, Goldsmith, Richardson. 'Tom Jones,' 'Clarissa,' the immortal 'Vicar,' 'Roderick Random,' 'Pamela'—how the stories had been thumbed, to be sure! They must have afforded incalculable delight. There were some histories, and a few philosophical treatises. And now enough outline has been supplied to enable any one who may be curious on the subject to fill in the details for himself, and to decide as to what particular authors the cases might or might not contain.

It may be presumed that our great-grand-parents, and grand-parents, did not consider very easy seats to be essential to comfort; for the idea is absurd of their having universally afflicted their own loins with upright and obdurate chairs and settees simply out of compliment to Queen Charlotte. No; owing to some cause or other, they certainly preferred furniture of patterns which to us moderns appear penal. The Queen may have been formal, but the age also was formal; it preferred form to ease; and so the furniture which was most fashionable was the least adapted for rest or convenience. It was the age of powder and minuets, of hoops and queues, of ceremony and artificial manners. It was vulgar to be comfortable; and low natures which desired to be so had to enter into their closets like them who pray in sincerity: indeed, to relax the stiffness which the time imposed was almost as disreputable as to say one's prayers or to utter a religious remark.

Notwithstanding, then, its prim ceremonious style, the library had, as has been said, a look of much comfort to people of those days. We, enlightened moderns, may pity their ignorance and folly; but, as with the beard of Touchstone's antagonist, so with their furniture,—they cut it to please themselves.

The lamps had just been brought in. Their ample light was one contributor to the cheerful look of things; but another powerful one was the bright, glowing fire, which, within its own precincts,—that is to say, over the large hearth-rug, and

up to the massive table some way beyond, and on the surface of the handsome folding-screen,—refused to recognise the glare of the oil, and kept its own ruddy tint on floor and furniture, occasionally enforcing its views as high as the ceiling, which, however, had no fixed light at all, but vacillated contemptibly between fire and lamps.

It is almost superfluous to add to what has been said (for the reader perceives that the scene belongs to the end of the eighteenth century), that there was a high and large mantel-piece with a broad shelf. On this shelf stood two handsome candlesticks. Near them were specimens of ore, curious and fine crystals, a toy which was supposed to do the office of a barometer, beads, feathers, and other nick-nacks which had been brought from the South Seas by one of our circum-navigators, and some beautiful shells.

He who cast his eyes above these treasures perceived, what the closely-ranged bookcases forbade him to discover at another point, namely, that the walls were panelled with oak; he saw also an oval space on the wainscot on which hung eight or nine miniature portraits; to right and left of these he saw a few swords and pistols, and, under the miniatures, an officer's gorget. High above all, and approaching the ceiling, was a portrait of an old gentleman in a wig and a gown, with a folio open before him: he did not, however, at any time look on his book, as far as could be observed, but answered the regard of any and every beholder, as if his principal business was to oversee what was done in that room of which he might have been the tutelary genius.

The screen has been already mentioned. It was a warm, velvet-covered, crimson shelter, intervening always between the fire and the door during winter.

Enough has been said about the room, simply as a room; but then we know that the room did not exist for itself,—it argued a possessor. Even our globe, with all its grandeur, all its beauty, all its design, would be naught if there were not an intelligent being to admire and enjoy it. So it was with this library; only the pen has rioted a little in writing that word *intelligent*, and caused the simile to fail to a great extent. For although the old gentleman who sat behind the screen and by the fire would undoubtedly have been classed by a naturalist as "intelligent," yet, colloquially, even a florid talker, who had already drawn largely on his stock of epithets, would hardly, in his extremity, have ventured to speak of this as an "intelligent man." Genteel, nay, somewhat imposing, he looked as he sat in his straight-backed, stingily leathered arm-chair; the

guinea's stamp was plainly enough impressed on him, but the man—ah!

It is written of the hero Tydeus that his little body bore a mighty mind: now here was a case differing essentially from that of Tydeus—the case of a large, well-proportioned body, with a mind which only by courtesy owned that title—which if put to its proofs might have experienced some difficulty in establishing its mentality, or its mind-hood, or whatever is the proper word for expressing the mind's estate. Not that there was fatuity. No; the mind was not more defective than many thousands of minds which manage to take care of bodies under far more difficult circumstances than were here present. But the body under consideration was so pretentious, it indicated so many high qualities, that the deficiency of them, when it became apparent, provoked remarks which would not have occurred had mind and person been of types equally low.

This gentleman, when on his legs, was erect and stately still; his carriage was very good. The features of the face had become elongated, and the countenance was deeply lined and sadly solemn; but it was easy to believe that it had been a handsome enough head in earlier days. His manner, which always showed good breeding, was said by those who knew but little of him to be dignified, by those who knew him well to be pompous. He was endowed with the invaluable gift of holding his tongue: and let no man assert (as some erroneously have asserted) that this was simply because, being without ideas, he had nothing to say; for who has not met with many a loquacious man who had not a single idea? The reticence was a bar to the discovery of the real character, and indeed so many of the attributes gave false indications, that the gentleman was often stigmatised as an impostor, which he was not, neither had he the wit to be. Nature had given him his inconsistencies; he had not invented any of them.

He had been a soldier, and had served in the American war, where it is possible that he did his duty fairly. Yet it must be owned that there were stories whispered about which hinted that he had, in a sharp action, saved himself much after the manner of Sir John Falstaff at Shrewsbury, by pretending to be dead. But these stories rested on no authority. It is easy to suppose that jesting spirits, who presumed to ridicule him when they were alone over their cups, may have first imagined some recreant act as probable, then been pleased with the invention and made a standing joke of it, and finally let it escape beyond their circle and impose itself on outsiders as a fact. On the other hand, it was quite conceivable that the lapse

imputed might have happened. The question will never now be settled; the doubt cannot be cleared away. It is like the little shadow which flits about the poet Horace's reputation. Did he really ever leave his shield and run away, or did he only put into his verse some flourish which we don't understand?

Well, whether the veteran sought the bubble reputation, or whether he ran away from it, he had soon to alter his way of life. He had thought himself a soldier of fortune, but by the unexpected failure of heirs in another branch of his house, he had become a baronet of no fortune,—that is to say, a baronet without any property to speak of. Perhaps he did not know how the estates had been dissipated when he left the service; but, be that as it may, he did leave it. Furthermore, he by marriage became possessed of some means, and he was now Sir Wolsey Salusbury of Traseaden Hall, a contented, quiet old gentleman when everything went quite smoothly with him, and he had nothing whatever to do but to wander about the gardens or hothouses, or to dose in the library; but a miserable person when he had to arrange or decide, or when things ran contrarily.

He is now seen in very doleful case, for which there is substantial reason. He sits upright in his chair, his long, serious face longer than usual, with no book before him, looking straight at the opposite bookcase, and not moving except to drum with his hand on the arm of his chair, which he does with as regular a pounding as if he had been a piece of mechanism wound up for a long spell of work. He had been stuck up there before the lights were brought,—he remained stuck up for some time after they were brought,—it would be hazardous to say how long he might have remained stuck up if no interruption of his reverie had occurred; but it was interrupted.

"Dr Curtis, Sir Wolsey," said a servant, opening the door; whereupon the baronet rose from his chair, and stood expectant on the rug. Presently a fussy, kindly-visaged man came with short, quick steps round the screen. "Good evening, Sir Wolsey," said he, in a voice cheery, yet subdued and serious.

"Ah, Curtis, glad to see you," said the baronet; "I told them to ask you to speak to me after you had seen your patient. Won't you come round and sit for a minute? Well, what of my lady?"—the last sentence uttered after they were both seated.

"Well, Sir Wolsey, I think we may be hopeful. Her ladyship is certainly no worse than she was this morning,—nay, I think she is even more composed. We must keep her from alarm or fretting; she may have a good night."

"You think she will have a good night?"

"Yes, I quite hope so. I can hardly understand why she has been so restless of late. It is impossible, I presume, Sir Wolsey, that Lady Salusbury can be mentally disturbed in any way?"

"Good heavens! no, sir. You are sure she is better since the morning?"

"Less excited; better pulse, which is certainly a favourable symptom. Nothing ought to be allowed to weigh upon her mind at present. Excuse me, Sir Wolsey, for making a remark of that kind again; but her ladyship's condition gives me the idea that there is some anxiety. A sick person, as you are aware, may be much troubled by what would not affect the same person when in health."

"There cannot be anything of the kind, sir. I must know of it if there were—I who watch her so anxiously. No, Curtis; dismiss that idea."

"With great pleasure, Sir Wolsey; by doing so I clear my case."

"Nobody can have less to weigh on the mind than my lady. I believe I know every thought."

"Now that you assure me of her mind being at ease, I have still better hope of a favourable issue."

"Her illness is a great affliction to me, Curtis."

"Unquestionably, Sir Wolsey. It is, as I have not disguised from you, a serious illness. But that does not mean a hopeless one, you know."

"Heaven forbid, sir!"

"Just so. No, it is not hopeless; and so I was going to add that you must not, by giving way to despondency, allow the inevitable anxiety to make you ill too."

"I have been accustomed to anxiety; I have followed a profession of which anxiety is one of the constant conditions," said Sir Wolsey, glancing at the arms and the gorget above the fire. "I do not think *that* is likely to injure me," he added, with a grim smile.

"Pardon me, if I slightly differ from you, sir. You have been, as we well know, accustomed to heavy responsibilities, called upon to form sudden decisions, and to exercise patience and self-control in the highest degree; we know well, too, how you acquitted yourself in such trying circumstances. But then there was constant activity of mind and body to put against your cares. Constant change of scene, a life spent in the open air. One trouble cured another. You could not brood on any particular affair."

"There was much to think of, as you say, Curtis."

"Well, now, don't you think that if you were to exercise your body a little freely, and to divert your mind, it might lighten what you have justly called this great affliction?"

"My habits are sufficiently active, sir, and I never cease to exercise my thoughts."

"Quite right, sir. That is what I mean. What did you think, Sir Wolsey, of that capture which our ships made from the Dutch in Saldanha Bay?"

"Have our ships been engaged in Saldanha Bay?"

"Certainly. You would see the account in the last 'Weekly Advertiser.'"

"I have not read the 'Weekly Advertiser.'"

"But you have heard an account of the capture; everybody talks of it."

"I had not heard of it until you mentioned it."

"Then you cannot have ridden to Danesmount for some days past, for they are full of it there; one of their house was in the fleet."

"I have not been there."

"Ridden more on the downs, perhaps—more airy there?"

"I have not ridden at all lately."

"Humph! Well, of course, you will soon have read these details. I see there is a very particular account. And then I shall be glad to know what you, an old and distinguished officer, may think of the affair."

"Sir, I do not read very much now. I prefer meditating on what I have already acquired."

The doctor felt baffled. He could not push his advice more persistently. There was only one person who could rouse the old gentleman to even the mildest effort. That was his wife. And she was now prostrated by illness; that is to say, that the mainspring of what had been a regular and admirably-conducted household was inoperative.

"Well, I take my leave now, Sir Wolsey. I will be here again in the morning."

"Cannot you stay and dine, Curtis? Dinner cannot be far off."

"Impossible, Sir Wolsey, thank you. My round is not finished yet, and scarcely will be this side of eight o'clock."

"Let me offer you a glass of wine and some cake, then."

"Nothing at all, I beg. You are very kind; but I must talk no longer. Good even, Sir Wolsey."

"Good evening, Curtis," answered the baronet, rising and grasping the bell-ropes. "Much obliged for this interview."

CHAPTER II.

THE INVALID'S DISCLOSURE.

By the time that Mr Curtis took his leave, his patient, in a bed-chamber of Traseaden Hall, had been freshened up as far as a sick person might be, and prepared for an introduction to the reader. According to his directions, she had been raised from her bed, had been wrapped by careful and loving hands in a sick-gown, and deposited gently in a really easy chair, well stuffed and covered with white dimity. There she lay, leaning against one of the head-rests, a neat, uncomplaining old lady, with much speculation in her eyes, that had not lost the keenness of their glance nor their power of motion.

The records which remain of this lady do not state that she was ever very beautiful, and so it may be concluded that she was not so; it required, however, no record save the wan features in the chair to prove that her countenance had been very pleasing, for here, in age and sickness, it was pleasing still. "A most agreeable woman," was what people said of her when she was young, while she was matronly, when she was old, and after she was cold. She possessed power of conversation, she was very well informed; her mind was active, her discretion and tact exceptional; so kind was her nature that she was the resort of all her intimates in their troubles, and that, in her parish and beyond it, she was reckoned a Lady Bountiful, practical, an excellent manager, a power, indeed, in her sphere. She had had two husbands, and it is presumable that, if they had died fast enough, and she had eschewed single life, she might have had a dozen. But her merit seemed to be not that she killed off husbands as wives were proverbially (it is hoped calumniously) said to do, but that she kept her lords alive longer than they could have lived without her. Certainly she had done this as regarded her second, or present, spouse. But for the wholesome stimulus which she was able sagaciously, and for the most part unseen, to apply to that old piece of propriety, he would have become an automaton, his circulation would have run down, he would have stiffened into a mummy without the aid of art.

In the chamber were, noiselessly moving about, two ladies, sisters, doing little offices for the invalid, placing a small table near to her hand, adjusting a fire-screen, and watching a time-piece that her medicine might be given exactly according to

prescription. There was between them a difference in age of two years or so. The elder was a stout, healthy, well-favoured woman; the younger was tall and straight, and used often to be spoken of as genteel. Dorothy Clowance was in her thirty-first year; Eleanor Clowance was in her twenty-ninth year. These ladies, or whichever of them happened to be attending their friend, took meals in a room near the sick-chamber, and did not now join Sir Wolsey in the dining-room. They were surely past being looked upon as girls, yet this was the style in which Lady Salusbury spoke to them.

"Girls, everything is very nice and comfortable now; don't give yourselves further trouble. Fisk will arrange it all. Sit down now, on the other side of the fire. I wish to talk to you, my dears."

The "girls" looked at each other for a minute; then Miss Clowance gently approached the sick-chair and said, pointing to the timepiece—

"It is almost time for your medicine. When that is taken, we can sit a little if you wish, Lady Salusbury."

"The medicine is not agreeable," said the patient; "there is a great deal of musk in it, which I never could bear. Still, if it will do me good— Now then, Eleanor, if you are ready, my dear. There, that is settled. Thank you, Dorothy," as Miss Clowance handed some confection to be taken after the potion.

"I daresay you will feel a little heavy now," said the latter. "Encourage a tranquil feeling by all means."

But it did not seem that a tranquil feeling ensued, for Lady Salusbury, after remaining silent a short time, said—

"I do not feel the least drowsy, neither do I expect to feel so at present. I have something to say to you, girls; and there will be a much better chance of my sleeping after it is said than before."

"We will sit by you," answered Miss Eleanor; "but pray do not exert yourself in speaking, or do anything which may break your rest."

"Yes, we will sit down," added Miss Clowance, "because possibly our moving ever so gently may incommode you. But do not trouble yourself to talk if you are not quite equal to it."

"My dears, you must sit over there, opposite to me; and I must speak to you. The sooner what I have to say is said the better."

The sisters sat down on the other side of the fire-place. The lights in the room were subdued, but there was a pleasant glow

from the fire. They were quite a cosy-looking group. And the quiet scene seemed at first to satisfy Lady Salusbury, for she remained silent for a space. Her thoughts, however, would not rest long, and at length she turned her head and began to speak.

"You must not think, girls, if I speak of the dispositions of property which will follow my death, that I consider my present condition hopeless. Pray do not think that I am giving way to despair. On the contrary, you may suppose, if I address myself to a serious matter, that I am feeling rather more energy than I have felt lately. These affairs are much better discussed while the deathbed is still some way off. I might have said to you what I am now going to say while I was in perfect health, as far as the subject is concerned; but there were reasons why I did not think it convenient to do so."

"Dear Lady Salusbury, I am afraid," Miss Clowance was beginning; while Miss Eleanor's tears began to flow, and she applied her handkerchief to her face.

"Now be steady and sensible, my dears, I beg. Depend upon it, I shall not die an hour sooner for what I am now going to say. I am sure that your affection for me is genuine. You cannot bear to think of parting with me. Believe that I would not unnecessarily make even a half hour sorrowful to you. But you will be more composed as I go on, and as you find that this is a subject which concerns you, and is in itself a little interesting."

Miss Eleanor dried her eyes, and Miss Clowance bowed her head in submission. They were not mercenary women. They had not an idea of what words were coming. But they were accustomed to defer without question to Lady Salusbury's wishes.

"You know," Lady Salusbury went on, "that you and your two sisters and brother are my nearest, almost my only blood relations; at any rate, you are the only ones remaining that have ever seemed like relations to me. And I love you all, as you know. When I look back on the many, many near ones that were living not so long ago, and several of whom seemed destined to outlive me, I am the more and more impressed by the constant ordering of our circumstances by a Power higher than ourselves. It is clear now, though it was obscure before, that the property which descended to me, and which I regard with some fondness as an old possession of our house, was to belong to some of you."

"You have a good husband, Lady Salusbury, and plenty of relations of *that* name," said Miss Clowance.

"I have a good husband, Dorothy; and any arrangement which I may have made, or may make, concerning my estate will take nothing from him as long as he lives,—of that you may be sure. But your remark about my connections of the house of Salusbury leads directly to the pith of what I am about to say. No one of the name of Salusbury—save always my good husband, of course—shall ever get a pennyworth of what I may leave behind me."

A little start and subdued exclamation here from Eleanor, on whose arm Dorothy lays her restraining hand.

"You are surprised. It pleases me in some sort to see that you are so; for it has been my endeavour that the world should not, that my husband himself should not, perceive that my coming among them had caused the least division in the family. I have treated always every Salusbury as *he* would have wished every Salusbury to be treated in his house. This was not hypocrisy. Those who principally have incurred my displeasure know very well what my feeling is toward them. They are a designing, an insincere, a despicable house!"

Here the speaker paused a minute, overpowered by emotion. The girls, unused to see her give way to feeling of this kind, were shocked. Dorothy, practical and self-possessed, glided swiftly to where a smelling-bottle and other restoratives lay near the invalid, and began to apply them; while Eleanor, jealous for the attributes of her friend, whom she had always looked upon as without parallel, said in broken sentences, and with feeling in her voice—

"It is not like you. You were always so superior. You could always pardon little weaknesses and tricks that we could never have borne. Do not, I pray you, Lady Salusbury, allow any trifling offences of theirs to make you show temper or vindictiveness."

"Come here, Eleanor," said the invalid; "kiss me, my love. Now again. Do not fear, sensitive Eleanor, that I will do anything to injure your good opinion of me. Sit down now, and listen to what I have to say further, and you will, I expect, agree with me, that I am going to do what is not only perfectly just, but what is due to myself."

The sisters sat down again, and Lady Salusbury proceeded.

"You know the affectionate terms on which my husband and I have always lived. You know how I have always been respected as the mistress of this house, and as his wife. It will startle you to learn that I and my possessions passed over to him as a matter of bargain—that I was *sold* to him."

"Lady Salusbury!" exclaimed both her hearers. Eleanor

flushed scarlet. Dorothy feared that her relative's head must be affected. But they both obeyed the motion of her hand, which forbade interruption.

"My dears, I don't mean to say that my husband did not woo me honourably, or that I did not love him. Fortunately, things turned out much better than they might have done, and I have not been a victim. I did not know until some time after my marriage, and then I found out by accident, that Chesterfield Salusbury, my husband's brother, held Sir Wolsey's bond for ten thousand pounds, to be paid after his marriage with me. I paid the amount, made Chesterfield give his acquittance, and told him what I thought of his conduct.

"Now, you are not to think of my husband as sharing in the infamy of this transaction. He is very unworldly, more so perhaps than you would imagine, and may, no doubt, where he has no one to warn or guard him, be made to serve a knave's purpose without partaking of the knavery. He was, however, the only one of his house that did not knowingly enter into a plot to bring the marriage about. They all, men and women, devised and effected it, careless of everything but bringing my fortune into their family, and getting what they could for themselves."

"But if they made you happy?" ventured Eleanor.

"Made me happy! It was God's mercy that they did not make me miserable. They cared no more how their intrigues might affect me than if I had been a slave in the market. It is their calculation, no doubt, that most of what is now mine will find its way to some of their house, Chesterfield or his son probably, after my husband; but I shall take care to prevent that, and that everything shall, after Sir Wolsey's death, revert to my own relations. I have, since my marriage, made two wills, each with this view, and each settling the inheritance according to the circumstances of our family at the time of its date. On account of the lives which have dropped since the last was made, I must now make another, which I will do without loss of time. You will find yourselves legatees immediately after my death, and those of you who may survive my husband will get back the whole of the estate."

"You are very kind and considerate," said Miss Clowance.

"I hope you will live long to enjoy your wealth yourself," said Miss Eleanor.

"Of course you will not say a word of what I have told you. It is our own business entirely. My husband must not have the smallest suspicion that you know anything of it. And you must not think him, although he signed the bond of which I

have spoken, at all like his relations in meanness and intrigue. He did not see the undertaking in the same light as most people would; and when it all became known to me, he was as indignant as I was myself, and exposed the whole of the doings of his bad kindred, the object of many of which he had never comprehended."

"Certainly," answered Miss Clowance; "we will be discreet. What you have told us is very extraordinary."

"I have sent for Mr Sigil to come in from Growcester as soon as possible," continued the sick lady; "then everything will be settled."

It seemed now as if Lady Salusbury, by making this communication, had relieved her mind as she expected, for she sank back in her chair with a sigh, closed her eyes, and was silent, while the other two ladies conversed in whispers. All was still for some little while, but by and by the eldest lady broke the silence.

"Understand, Dorothy and Eleanor," said she, "that I am not now filled with a sudden passion of vindictiveness from brooding over the way in which I have been treated. It is not so, I assure you. My purpose has been fixed for many a year. But it has occurred to me, left to my own thoughts as I am now, that the villany of Chesterfield Salusbury is capable of anything, and that he may attempt to beguile or even to defraud you, if he should find that you are ignorant of my intentions. Your brother even, as a clergyman, is not likely to be a match for, or even to comprehend, the depths of cunning and wickedness to which that man can descend. I have become convinced that it was better to advise you beforehand. We can trust Mr Sigil, and you know that you have to look to him to see that right is done; and mind that you sign nothing, consent to nothing, in regard to my will, without first asking his advice. The persons to have been chiefly benefited by my former wills were not likely to have been the victims of any knavery."

After these remarks, Lady Salusbury was completely composed, and dozed a little; but her eyes were again open, and she was becoming animated by the time her maid and another attendant came in and began to arrange the room—especially to set out and unfold a card-table, and to place candles, counters, and cards thereon. She then conversed again, but on indifferent subjects. She was, for a person so ill as she was, really cheerful.

While yet they were talking pleasantly, the lock of the door was heard to move, as if the handle had been turned by a per-

son endeavouring to be noiseless, but hardly practised enough in cautious movement to avoid being slightly heard. The little disturbance drew, of course, all eyes towards the door, which had now been opened sufficiently to allow the gaunt countenance of Sir Wolsey Salusbury to show itself in the aperture. The countenance wore a look which was not expressive, and would have been totally inscrutable to the vulgar, but which the initiated knew to be a confidential, gracious, and highly ingenious inquiry as to whether the sick lady and her surroundings were so disposed that a person of importance might with propriety enter the chamber. It has been supposed that, if Sir Wolsey had by any strange force of circumstances taken to the stage, by-play would not have been his happiest mode.

Miss Clowance moved her head to the apparition on the threshold to indicate that he might advance; but Lady Salusbury was also aware of his propinquity, and called in a weak voice, but loud enough for him to hear—

“Come in, Sir Wolsey; we are quite expecting you.”

Thereupon the baronet entered, and very gently closed the door; in reference as it were to which latter act, skilfully performed, he for an instant stretched forth his hand in a mildly expressive manner, as who should say, “Hush is the order here; I know it, you see.” Then with caution he moved to the sick-chair, and stooping over it, took his wife’s hand in his.

“How is my lady?” said he, softly; “I trust that the account is to be favourable this evening.”

“Thank you, dear,” was the answer; “I think I am more cheerful because a little stronger.”

“That is right, love. I am charmed to hear it. Do you know Curtis told me very much the same thing.”

“I am sure he thinks me better.”

“An attentive fellow, Curtis,” said the baronet, as he tenderly relinquished the hand and seated himself on a chair near his wife. “Curtis is a careful man, Eleanor; it is most fortunate that he thinks her better, Dorothy.”

“Indeed it is, Sir Wolsey,” answered Miss Clowance; “I have much faith in Mr Curtis. He attended our poor mother so kindly. Yes, I am sure there is great improvement.”

“I hope, my dear,” said the invalid, “that Curtis’s good report brightened you a little. I know how concerned you are at my illness. I hope that you were comforted, and that you went abroad for a little diversion.”

“It was dark when I saw Curtis.”

“And you had been in the house all day?”

“Yes, I had much business.”

"Well, if to-morrow should be fine, I beg that you will order out the harriers, and go and amuse yourself. I daresay somebody will join you in the field, and it will be a pleasure to tell of the favourable change in me. Now, you *will* go out! Promise me."

The promise was given. "I hope," went on Lady Salisbury, "that Mrs Honour sent you up a good dinner."

"Ah, yes, a good dinner."

"What did she give you?"

"M; let me see—what was it? oh, I had capon."

"Was it nice?"

"Yes; and ox-tongue, and soup; no, there was no soup; yes, there was giblet soup; and I ate two gizzards," at which announcement Sir Wolsey turned towards the younger ladies, and put his hands before his face, not daring to look at them after being guilty of such a solecism as talking of eating gizzards. He dexterously retreated, however, from his awkward position under cover of a brisk fire (for him) of further information. "Sweetbreads in a new sauce, very delicious; stewed celery, which I like; apple-pie with cream; there were cheese-cakes, which I didn't eat; and a late salad with the cheese."

"You took your wine, Sir Wolsey?"

"Wine! oh yes, certainly. Madeira."

"A proper quantity for a gentleman?" (it was a gentleman's *devoir* in those days to dispose daily of rather strong refreshment in this line.)

"Mason gave me three or four glasses, I think. One of them I recollect very well, for I drank it to your better health, my love."

"Thank you, dear. You are very gallant."

"And one I drank to the gallant sailors who have been fighting at—let me see, where did they fight? Curtis told me they had fought."

"Was it—was it at Saldanha Bay?" asked Eleanor timidly. Eleanor was a heroine, mute and inglorious perhaps, but not inattentive. She knew the whole victorious calendar of Great Britain.

"I really can't say. Upon my honour, I can't," answered the baronet. "But you may rely upon it there has been an action somewhere."

"How our sailors fight!" said Eleanor; "it seems to me that since that 1st of June two years ago they have been the most glorious people in the world."

"Ah, fighting," said Sir Wolsey; "thought of fighting recalls old times."

"You must have seen some dreadful battles, some desperate struggles."

"Yes, very dreadful, very desperate."

"Now, Sir Wolsey," said Lady Salusbury, "you must not spend more time in conversation. The rubber will not be over by my bed-time unless you begin at once. All my wants are supplied; and I shall be very quiet, and watch you while at play. Now, seat yourselves at the table."

"By all means, if you will be quite easy and comfortable in your chair, my dear. Would not you like some posset now, or some whey? It might make you sleep. No? Well, then, you know best, of course. Who will take Dummy; you, Dorothy, or shall I?"

"I'll take Dummy if you like, Sir Wolsey."

"If you please, then. I had him last night. Now it will be Eleanor and I. We have the joints of the table. Cut, Dorothy. Dummy has it. I will not offer to deal for you, because you deal so much quicker and better. You are sure you are warm enough, my love? You are sure you will have no posset? Spades, but not an honour. Now then!"

And the solemnity began.

Sir Wolsey Salusbury, save on Sundays, never went to bed without a rubber if he could help it. The want of it incommoded him much. He accepted Dummy, or even double Dummy, rather than have no whist at all. Again, he liked to pay all proper attention to his wife—nay, to evince the greatest affection for her according to his lights; and his feelings would have been cruelly divided between the cards down-stairs and the wife above, if the cards and the wife had not been, as Lady Salusbury arranged matters, in one and the same room.

Many persons who had, after some acquaintance with him, formed rather a mean opinion of our baronet, had been afterwards, by happening to play whist with him, convinced that their earlier opinion had been right, and that they had too hastily changed it for the worse. It has been hinted that he was without much ability of any kind, but a reservation should have been of whist, by which is of course meant long whist, for the short game had not been heard of in his days. Nature had made whist his strong point; so far as the incidents of his life gave opportunity of judging, that was his mission—he came into the world to play whist with accuracy.

He was incapable of those brilliant strokes conceived on the moment, and applicable only to exceptional combinations, by which the reputation of the great whist-player is made. But he had in perfection all ordinary requisites for steady playing.

He who could remember important matters but confusedly, never forgot a card that had dropped during the game. After a round or two, he divined with wonderful accuracy the state of every hand at the table. He never missed a deal, never revoked, never did nor left undone anything without being able to defend his play by authority. Winning by breaking through routine was, as has been said, beyond him; but within the beaten track he went along like an old mill-horse, deviating neither to the right hand nor to the left. He never omitted to reckon his honours, or to call at eight if entitled to do so. He had been known, in morning conversation, to detail the four hands, and the contents of every trick, in an interesting or disputed game of the night before.

"Surely," exclaims the reader, "a man who could evince so much mental power at whist, must have been able to successfully apply his brains to higher purposes, had he been so minded." But the evidence is entirely against this assumption. His gift seemed to be confined to one branch of knowledge. Possibly some relation similar to electricity existed between him and the cards. We know that one substance will draw sparks where another cannot. Pasteboard seemed alone capable of exciting this arid brain to action. To the day of his death he could not have told the product of seven multiplied by eight; but he could have said, without stopping to reckon, how many hearts were in hand at the tenth round, and who held the best.

Sir Wolsey insisted on what has since been called "the rigour of the game." The rubbers were, therefore, very silent, except during deals, when he always turned and said some affectionate words to his wife, who remained awake and watched the players. As it was not late when they began, they contrived to drag through two rubbers, each of three games, and of deals innumerable. When they were at last over, he took his leave with much kindness and some ceremony, having been reminded that he was to go out with the harriers to-morrow.

CHAPTER III.

A LOOK BACK.

It is probable that a great number of high-minded women will feel as indignant as Lady Salusbury did at the arrangement by

which her marriage had been brought about, and at the undoubtedly mercenary game which the Salusbury family had been playing, when all the while, by their professions and behaviour, they had been exhibiting the greatest admiration of, and attachment to, herself. It is not flattering, one must admit, to find that oneself and one's affections have been coolly made the objects of a money bargain, and that the real nature of the transaction had been cleverly concealed until circumstances have so arranged themselves that there is no remedy or retreat. It is, we all know, embarrassing to have to frame an indictment wherein one's lately married husband must figure as one of the indicted.

Lady Salusbury had been a little weak for once, or she would hardly have been imposed upon; but her ordinary good sense and good temper served her admirably when the discovery came about. She did not make the whole neighbourhood resound with the proclamation of her wrongs; she did all the washing, and the ironing too, at home very quietly; her anger did not overpower her judgment; it was soon clear to her quick perception that her husband had been more sinned against than sinning; her full forgiveness was extended to him when she had heard his ingenuous confession. But her undying wrath was kindled against her brother and sister-in-law, and against the whole house of Salusbury; she thought it the most perverted and utterly reprobate family that had existed since Borgias and Cenci were in vogue.

It will be understood, without explanation, that this chapter has been written, so far, looking at things from the ladies'—from the high-minded ladies'—point of view. Of course, nobody who has been concerned in drawing up this account would for a moment pretend to hold up the house of Salusbury as sinners above all the houses that could be named. Forbid it, candour, and the experience of every day. No, no! let no man (or woman) of the world be scared away from these pages under the belief that they reflect only the ideas of recluses, who live in an atmosphere of imaginary purity, and are horrified at any little commingling of the affections,—that is to say, of marriage and mammon. Practical men know that we are bound to temper sentiment with prudence a little. Talk of bargaining with a rather backward brother as to the price at which a rich charming widow shall be run down for him; why, such things have been whispered about as bargains made in the city by loving fathers, who dispose of their tender daughters to titled or wealthy buyers as coolly as they would sell cotton or madder! And in a still lower whisper one has heard of softer

beings than fathers doing a little business on their own account, and, if not actually offering themselves for sale in the matrimonial market, vowing love and obedience somewhat in a parrot fashion, while their hearts thought only of the fortunes they were marrying, and the pleasures they might bring. The house of Salusbury had its less noble qualities, but it is not going to be held up in this narrative as a family unmatched for meanness, or for a rather exclusive concern for number one. This repudiation of a too narrow conscience is a fit preface to a few remarks which will follow concerning the family in question, or that branch of it to which the baronetcy had now passed.

The said branch was poor; and it cannot be called proud, but it had in days long past a strong appreciation of the benefit derivable from a pedigree, and from cousinship with a succession of titled persons. Hence it was that one brother bore the name of Wolsey and the other of Chesterfield; for some early Salusbury (who, of course, was a knight and not a baronet) was said to have been connected with the great Cardinal, whether respectably or otherwise does not appear; and a baronet of a generation or two back had certainly bandied compliments with the Earl whose morals and manners have been so prettily enlogised by Dr Johnson. Moreover, the very name of Chesterfield argued a familiarity with, and a preference for, what was courtly and polished.

The title had belonged to a cousin once removed, with two brothers and a son, at the time when Wolsey and Chesterfield began the world. The property had been pretty well disposed of before that date. Entails had been cut; betting, gaming, and all kinds of dissipation and extravagance were common in the house; so it was well known that there was nothing but the title to succeed to, and, according to what has been said, there was scant chance of Wolsey or Chesterfield succeeding to that. Indeed, the father of these two had seen very plainly that nothing was to be expected from the family, and that it behoved him and his to look out for themselves. His own method of looking out was peculiar. Notwithstanding great scantiness of means, he was an expensive and extremely liberal man,—if the man can be called liberal who has no means of his own, and who, if he gives at all, must give at others' expense; he was active and quick-sighted; had the art of making acquaintances at discretion, and friends in fair numbers; visited at the best houses; did a little fortunately on the turf and at hazard; owed money in every direction, but was much esteemed notwithstanding (he had been known to pay other people's

debts, but never a debt of his own); managed to obtain bits of patronage for persons of every class; borrowed sometimes from Jews, but more frequently from acquaintances; kept an excellent table; and would have married his only daughter to a wealthy man, and made free use of his son-in-law's purse, only that the daughter made an impromptu marriage for herself. Not being behind her parent in wit, she probably divined the sort of use to which she was likely to be put, and made a choice for herself before it was too late.

Mr Salusbury managed to educate his sons as he managed everything else; somebody paid for rearing them, it is presumed. A military friend was induced to take Wolsey into his regiment—to give him a pair of colours, as the phrase then was; some outfitter suffered for Wolsey's kit, and was quieted by a good place in the Excise for his son. This was a serious difficulty overcome. Wolsey had not the tact or address with which his parent was endowed, and he had a constitutional weakness, which his father had not—he was troubled with scruples bearing a distant resemblance to conscience.

Wolsey being thus provided for, to dispose of Chesterfield was a less formidable matter. Chesterfield would not starve as long as anybody had a crust; and Chesterfield, however poorly set up in life, would make his own way. This was not an unreasonable expectation, for if Mr Salusbury himself had known how to make the world his oyster, much more might Chesterfield be backed to do so—Chesterfield being much bolder than his father, if somewhat less polished. Chesterfield's youth had been roughened by the lawless style which heralded the French Revolution, and which even here in stable England modified ideas and habits. But Chesterfield was, on these accounts, only the more in harmony with his time. "He shall be called to the bar," said his father. "Chesterfield will be a first-rate lawyer, perhaps Lord Chancellor; why not, egad? Thurlow can't be sharper."

There is much reason for believing that Chesterfield might, to a great extent, have fulfilled his father's prediction, had it not appeared to him that the parental process was necessarily a slow one. The plan of it was good, no doubt, but Chesterfield's rapid genius showed him a more excellent way—a way which dispensed with hard work and waiting. While keeping his terms at one of the Inns of Court, he contrived to make the acquaintance of a lady in the city, with a good fortune at her own disposal, and to acquire her favourable regard. His connections stood him in good stead in his wooing, and he was soon enabled to announce to Mr Salusbury that he was about

to settle himself in life. The latter, though he had a mind above petty considerations where the main chance was concerned, yet, if he had a weakness, was tender about family. Good connections, he thought, were not only the right thing for a gentleman to aim at, but they were really, in the long run, more profitable than a moderate fortune could be if soiled with a degrading alliance.

Chesterfield, however, was determined, and there was, even to his father, a silver lining to this cloud, inasmuch as a little money in the family, though drawn from a muddy source, might prove very useful. And, as if divining his parent's train of thought, Chesterfield promised to lend him £300. This, which to Mr Salusbury's mind looked like the earnest money of many a future sum, carried Chesterfield's point for him. The marriage was celebrated with the sanction of the house of Salusbury, and with much pomp. The bride believed that she received an ample equivalent for her fortune; the bridegroom, seeing how quickly and easily he had stepped into competence, did not regret his bargain, albeit his bride's person was not attractive, and her mind and manners were homely. He lent his father the £300, but did not afterwards bleed as freely as his excellent parent desired. There were little coolnesses between them on this account; but each found that he could get on much better with the aid of the other, so there was no lasting rupture. The union produced a son, of whom we shall hear more hereafter. When his grandson was aged seven years, old Mr Salusbury died in the odour of selfishness. "My cousins are dropping fast," said he in feeble words towards his last gasp; "if I could live a little longer, there is no saying but the baronetcy — It would certainly, if I had it, bring a seat for the county, and a hundred other things. Yes, it is a race between me and Sir Dunstan, and bottom will win. Take care that I get my medicine regularly. I'm sure he's a precarious life—very much so." That night his soul was required of him.

Meanwhile Wolsey, a good-natured, harmless noodle, but looking a fine, stalwart soldier, held his ground in his regiment. He was known there, after a time, of course, as not likely to ignite the Thames; and occasionally he afforded some fun, of which he was but partially conscious. But whatever little joking fell to his lot was strictly within the regimental area; they knew the value of his appearance and manner, and always, in the presence of outsiders, showed him respect, and rather gave him prominence, as he was not likely to compromise them by incautious tattling. Women looked kindly at his grand person; and if he had had his brother's ambition and sagacity,

he might have done brilliantly for himself. But his gravity did not understand ogles nor sighs. The handsome captain, as he was called, walked insensible through the pounding of love's artillery. His friendly colonel, and another officer or two, who had lived long enough to know that shining hours must be improved, tried to draw his attention to some exceptionally fine opportunities. "Bless us, Salusbury, that lovely Miss St Percent is almost throwing herself into your arms; don't, for Heaven's sake, neglect her advances; even you may regret such indiscretion;" or, "By George, Salusbury, what the devil are you made of? If the Silver Belle" (nickname) "were to look half as softly at me as I saw her doing at you when you were nearly asleep on the corner of a sofa, I should be at her feet before I had time to think, and that, too, if she were not half so rich as she is." To which Wolsey would reply, "Always kind, Colonel, but really you should not flatter;" or, "I don't mind a joke from you, Probyn, old fellow; you don't mean any harm." And then he would turn apologetically to the others, and add, "Old Probyn will have his joke, you know," and look as solemn and sapient as an owl.

The war came, and, as has been said, there was a little obscurity as to Wolsey's achievements in the field. Some pains have, however, been taken to ascertain the circumstances under which he left his regiment and went on half-pay; and it may be accepted as certain that he did not retire until he received intelligence of his having succeeded to the baronetcy. Whether this intelligence was coincident with any other cause there is no evidence to show. He came home, and naturally went to the house of his brother Chesterfield. Chesterfield was proud to introduce his brother the baronet in the Furze Range. They looked carefully into all documents connected with the estate which accompanied the title. It was a sorry business, and that it was so seemed to distress Chesterfield more than Sir Wolsey himself.

One does not for a moment do Chesterfield Salusbury the injustice of supposing that the small fortune distressed him on his brother's account; of course that was not it. But Chesterfield had selfish reasons for desiring a rich relation. He had scattered his wife's money (which had been but little tied up) with rather a lavish hand. He could not think of reducing his expenditure, and his talents were a good deal exercised in keeping up appearances. Had simple Wolsey acceded to property, the lion's share of it would probably have come to Chesterfield. But poor Wolsey, estate and half-pay combined, had as little as a baronet could possibly shuffle along with.

After the birth of her son—who was named Dunstan, after his late cousin, for the blood's sake—Mrs Chesterfield Salusbury had been dangerously ill, and her life was despaired of. Had she died, as was expected, Chesterfield intended to repeat his matrimonial achievement, with the advantage of greater experience. He had got his thousands in his first venture; he would get his ten thousands now. But Mrs Chesterfield acted the part of a veritable obstructive to this design. She would not die, neither could she recover her health, but she hung on hand a hopeless invalid, yet an invalid, as the doctors now said, who might live quite as long as her husband. Chesterfield had never loved his wife, and he now hated her for her inconsiderate conduct.

A little—a very little—of Mrs Chesterfield's money had been secured for her special benefit, and placed in trust. To get this money and spend it was now the object of Chesterfield's principal manoeuvres. As the trustees would listen to nothing but what came from his wife, he was obliged to take a strand or two out of the habitual unkindness with which he treated her, in order to bend her to his views. Sum after sum had he thus induced the trustees to give up to her, and they were becoming more impracticable at every application. He once thought the principal would last her time, and, if she were out of the way, he could easily find more. But her time did not seem so near an end, and the situation had become embarrassing.

The truth was already dawning upon Chesterfield, that he might never have the chance of a second marriage. His easy success in his young days had disinclined him to a slow process of bringing in money, however sure it might be. No, he must operate by a sudden *coup*. His son was a lad, and matrimony for him was out of the question for some years; but his brother Wolsey—might not something be made of Wolsey? It was clearly the interest of him and his son to keep Wolsey single. But could this be done? Chesterfield pondered the problem, and decided that it could not be done. Wolsey might, he thought, be controlled, and might be content to doze away his life, heedless of matrimony and of most things that men in general care for; but could the women be controlled? A handsome man, passing for gallant and talented, and moreover ornamented with a title, could he escape being made prize of by some designing dowager or spinster? Chesterfield feared that his marriage must and would be, and that all that lay in his power would be to direct Wolsey's choice. Then again, suppose Wolsey's marriage should be followed by the appearance of an heir to his title—what a crushing thing for Chesterfield and his offspring! Still, Chesterfield decided that this was the best risk to run.

Accordingly, he wound up Sir Wolsey with great regularity, made him show himself in the hunting-field and with his gun, paraded him at county meetings and race-courses, gave many entertainments himself, and bore him to dinners, balls, and routs. A very little of this activity satisfied Sir Wolsey, for whom a garden-seat in the summer and a chimney-corner to hibernate in would have been ample accommodation. But his brother knew how to work him, and to persuade him of the immense importance of showing himself while his fame was fresh. At this period no whisper of the *parvulum non bene relictum* had got abroad, and every one was content, nay eager, to accept the baronet as the distinguished warrior that he looked.

"Remarkably modest man, Sir Wolsey Salisbury," observed the Lord-Lieutenant of Gillinghamshire; "can hardly be got to speak of his campaigns. Very becoming in him, such a splendid fellow as he evidently is! The reticence adds immensely to the impression which he makes."

"Yes, and Sir Wolsey is a bachelor too," answered the lady to whom this had been addressed. "I find him entirely charming. A loquacious man has always been my aversion; it is the sign of a weak mind. General Wolfe, I am told, was a man of very few words." The latter speaker would have found it difficult to make good her assertion that talkers had always been her aversion. She was a coquette who accepted the attentions of men of all kinds and dispositions, and who certainly was not insensible to the pleasures of listening to soft nonsense. Her remark, however, no doubt truly explained her sentiment of that season, and it is useful to us as an indication of the direction in which the wind was blowing.

CHAPTER IV.

HERO-WORSHIP.

Chesterfield, having decided to marry Wolsey, knew perfectly well the expediency of marrying him quickly. If once an unlucky exposure should lead to the discovery of Wolsey's real calibre, the game would be up. But Wolsey, it must be admitted, unconsciously maintained the deception with great effect; notwithstanding which success, Chesterfield lived in a perpetual dread of what he might say or do inconsistent with

the character which had been assigned to him. It must be remembered that those were days of two-bottle and even three-bottle men, of night-long sittings over the wine, of locked doors, of drunkenness classed more nearly with virtues than with vices, of swaggering and quarrelling, of gaming and other immorality. When the purity of his private life could be made a reproach even to the Prime Minister, it was a trying time for a tom-noddy.

But Sir Wolsey stood the trial. His reputation as a proved soldier saved him from being tested by bullies (as infallibly would have been the lot of such a man unprotected by the military taboo), and his inoffensiveness prevented anything like a reputable quarrel. Half the smutty allusions that he heard he did not understand; and toward those which were within his comprehension, he did not exhibit disgust or any irritating moral objection, but only a superior tolerant recognition, causing it to be inferred that, after his experience at mess-tables, and at the boards of princes and ministers, it would be hard to tickle him with second-hand, provincial indecency. Moreover, Wolsey carried his liquor well, his stomach being good, and his brain such as could not easily come to harm. Indeed, he was improved by a good allowance of wine, for when other men began to be drunk, Wolsey began to feel alive; and (with all deference to Mr William Cowper be it said) his liquor, though it wasn't tea, did cheer him within bounds, and did not inebriate him. So he would chirrup a little with the rest, and relax his solemn features to a smile, and drink toasts with what looked like enthusiasm under the restraint of a well-balanced mind, and even join without *abandon* in a chorus, or steer a drunken squire through the dining-room doors, which was thought one of those acts of condescension of which the really brave and distinguished are generally capable. And when any of the *convives* were sober enough to notice his little bursts of animation, instead of saying in their hearts, "I did not think Master Silence had been a man of this mettle," they rather marvelled at the strength of character which could so effectually curb a nature which was really full of jollity and good fellowship.

Sir Bilberry Bumper, shivering at the covert-side, where he was detained one scentless morning, beguiled the tedium by a reference to what had occurred the night before and the same morning earlier. Said he to his gossip, while he glanced at Sir Wolsey sitting gracefully on his chestnut at some little distance: "Our military friend still as popular as ever, and right that it should be so. A thoroughly consistent man, sir; no humbug about *him*. Now, I'll tell you, Fivebars, in my conscience I don't believe there's a really jollier dog going than

Salusbury. If he let his nature have way, he'd be carried to bed as a rule, shoot his man a week, and make up to every woman in the parish. But I think I fathom him, sir. I think I perceive his ruling passion—recollect, don't you, what Mr Pope says about the ruling passion?—his ruling passion is ambition. Yes, everything else is with him subordinated to that. He's capable of being great; he's determined to be great; and, by Jupiter, he will be great!"

N.B.—The "Jupiter" here requires emendation: our heathenism did not, we may proudly boast, extend to our oaths, which testified to a pure creed or monotheism, if none other of our practices did so.

Chesterfield had in his mind, if not in his desk, a correct list of all the eligible matches within reach. He ran these over carefully, and in a rational way, looking at what might be practicable as well as what might be desirable. After no long scrutiny, he made choice of some half-dozen ladies, from among whom it was decided that the future Lady Salusbury must come. Two of these—excellent fortunes, one a spinster of a certain age, the other a widow—he was obliged to pass by, because the spinster was known to be so close about money that it would be impossible to drive a profitable bargain with her, and because the widow was so clever and penetrating that she would be sure to detect Sir Wolsey's true value on nearer acquaintance, to reject him herself, and so to spoil his market generally. Out of the other four he had almost decided on an unprolific-looking old maid, with little sense, broad lands, a desire for an establishment, and no particular objection to a title. But while he was getting everything ready to lay siege to this fair one, fate took the matter into her own hands, and, as sometimes happens, carried through to a triumphant conclusion one of the schemes which Chesterfield had rejected as unpromising and dangerous.

It happened one evening that Chesterfield Salusbury was busily observing the company in a drawing-room, as was his wont. Near him was Mrs Bathurst, the widow who has been mentioned above, patting her fan carefully against her face as she talked with an acquaintance. Her manner and attitude indicated indifference, yet Chesterfield, who was not guided by general appearance alone, but took note of special circumstances, saw her eyes furtively wandering in a direction quite oblique to the person whom she was addressing. Turning his own eyes in the same direction, he perceived his brother Wolsey passing along, stately, erect, and unconcerned, as he generally was. "Ho, ho," thought Chesterfield, "she's looking at his broad

shoulders, is she? Egad, if that's the case, her discernment may not be so clear in regard to him as it is to most things. The game seems to be playing itself." Still, knowing how difficult it must be to impose on Mrs Bathurst, he dared not for the present attempt any advance. He simply suspended operations for a while against the spinster whom he had before devoted, and awaited further manifestations. Again, more than once, he detected the widow's eyes coursing o'er Wolsey's exterior; the game seemed to grow livelier, but still he hesitated, the stake was so great.

"I will sound the widow, though never so cautiously," said Chesterfield. He knew quite well how to do this; he mentioned his brother parenthetically and as if accidentally to her, throwing in at the same time a remark so careless that it seemed scarcely to belong to his foregoing speech,—“Peculiar fellow, you know, Wolsey; can't deal with him as with most.”

“Sir Wolsey Salusbury,” replied Mrs Bathurst, not noticing the main observation which introduced Wolsey, “is certainly peculiar, inasmuch as he is vastly superior to the general run of men that one meets. If I might be allowed to make a remark concerning your brother (I would not make a disparaging one, you may be sure), it is, that he is too conscious of his own desert—a strange imputation, you will think, on one whose modesty has been so constantly noticed; but, though it is well to retire from the applause of the vulgar, it can only be regarded as pride, merit being admitted, to avoid the closer acquaintance of friends who desire only to show appreciation of his worth, and who would be incapable of wounding his diffidence—his becoming diffidence.”

Her hearer bowed, and tapped his snuff-box.

“You are very gracious, madam; no doubt you are right, as is generally the case; but to return to the charming singer of whom we were speaking, do not you think that her higher notes——” And here Chesterfield, who seemed to be full to running over of the criticism which his mention of Wolsey had interrupted, became very animated, as if the attempt to change the subject had annoyed him. All the time this politic designer was busy making “a prief” in his mental note-book of Mrs Bathurst's little speech.

On this he pondered as he lay awake through a great part of that night. “The mine is charged and the train laid,” thought he, “as if genii had been at work in anticipation of my plan. Now then, I must decide at once either to quash this action (he hadn't forgotten his old law phrases) or to run the enormous risk of detection by her of the real state of the case, which

means ruin not only for this but for all equally eligible matches. If her penetration once pierces his frigid exterior, and gets a glimpse of the hopeless void within, there is an end of all. She will proclaim him ass, and she has weight enough to carry the whole neighbourhood round with her." The end of a long controversy with himself was, that the hazard of the die should be faced. There were dangers in plenty, but her partiality, of which he no longer doubted, was a host on his side. That was his charmed weapon, his blessed banner, and he would win with it. His last thought was, after he had made up his mind, and while he was turning over for a short nap after his cogitations, *Vidua vult decipi, decipiat!*

That he might the more easily control matters, he determined that the campaign should be opened under his own roof. His poor invalid wife had to rouse herself, and to pretend to do the honours to a party of moderate numbers, invited to stay a day or two, and to join in various rural amusements. She had a part given her to play, and was ordered to keep her eyes open, and to make reports. But, not feeling much confidence in either the ability or the strength of his wife, he reconciled himself to his sister, the lady who had offended her relations by marrying independently, as before mentioned, and brought her on the scene to assist in the plot. She was a true Salusbury, and entered with gusto into the widow-chase, to the success of which she materially contributed. He manœuvred so that Wolsey, while constantly in the widow's view, should very seldom be *tête-à-tête* with her—so that her admiration might grow and her fancy be piqued, with but small danger of disillusion. And everything seemed to answer admirably. She did not appear to be critically disposed toward the baronet, and the baronet, quite unconscious of his position, came through with his usual good fortune.

It was a little embarrassing that Mrs Bathurst would continually approach military subjects, thereby intending, no doubt, to draw the voice which she desired to hear more freely into the conversation. She began this at dinner the first day; but military subjects did not make Wolsey a bit more talkative. "I hear," said she, "and on the best information, that Lord Cornwallis is determined immediately to attack Philadelphia."

"Indeed, ma'am," said a hearty squire who sat near her, "and that's hugely good news. I drink to his success. He'll be certain to take it from those American fools."

"I join in your toast, Tantivy," answered another squire, "but I don't dare to feel so certain of the result as you do. I can't forget that the rebels have shown courage and some

ability in previous affairs. We may get Philadelphia, and I wish we may, and scare the Quakers. But really as to making sure——”

“You gentlemen evidently are not likely to agree about Cornwallis’s chances,” observed the widow. “Now I should much like to hear a soldier’s opinion on the matter. No doubt Sir Wolsey Salisbury has studied the question. Would he kindly tell us what he thinks?”

Thus appealed to, Sir Wolsey pauses in his discussion of a slice of venison, looked more than ordinarily imposing and intelligent, and said, “There will be many broken heads before Philadelphia is taken. I drink, madam, to your very good health.”

“Always on your guard, Sir Wolsey,” the widow rejoined. “There is no surprising you into the expression of an opinion unless you wish to disclose it;” and she followed this remark with a slight motion of her head, which seemed to say, “You are a sensible man, which either of these outspoken squires is not.”

Chesterfield, who had watched this encounter with no little anxiety, thought now that really he need not be so fearful for Wolsey. He did not know that the answer which the latter had given was one very common at the mess-table of his old regiment, when the capture of a town was spoken of. Simple as it was, he did not invent it, but only repeated it like a parrot. But if Chesterfield was relieved by Wolsey’s answer, much more was he comforted by that little nod which the widow gave. Most expressive he thought it was. It said a whole volume of things, all flattering to the military man; indeed, it convinced Chesterfield that there was more than admiration here—there must be love!

And it is possible that this little intelligent nod bore more fruit than the head that made it ever knew. Chesterfield was on rather intimate terms with Mr Sheridan; had helped to procure him accommodation once or twice; had patched up a quarrel for him, arising out of one of his jokes; and had been found beside him in the gutter one morning at daybreak. There is reason to believe that he, soon after the above-named dinner, gave his friend, over a bottle, his ideas concerning the eloquent intimations which a shake of the head might be made to convey; and the passage concerning Lord Burleigh’s expressive shake, which soon after appeared in ‘The Critic,’ seemed to prove that the words were not spoken to inattentive ears.

It was time now to enlighten the baronet a little. Chesterfield missed him from some amusement at which the company generally were very busy, hunted him through a part of the grounds, and ran into him in a shrubbery.

"Anything the matter, Wolsey?"

"No, nothing; only one gets tired of hearing so many voices."

"Well, then, suppose we get away from the crowd. I'll have our horses brought. I want to gallop young Tierney. And—and—I want to talk a little to you, Wolsey."

"To me?"

"Yes, to you, on a matter of some importance."

"Why not talk here?" inquired Wolsey, who was disgusted at the thought of the "talk," and did not think it would be made more tolerable by the trouble of going to ride.

"Look at all these bushes round. Impossible to say who may be within hearing, or who may come this way just when one may be speaking earnestly and be off one's guard."

"Ah, yes; then let us go to your closet, and I'll sit on the comfortable sofa."

"I don't feel safe even in my own room with the door locked. Things are overheard in such a strange way; and what I have now to say must be between you and me for the present. The open down is the place. Nobody can get within earshot there without our knowing it. Come, get on your boots, and we'll meet in the stable-yard presently, and go out by the groom's cottage. It won't do to be seen riding off while there are people in the house."

CHAPTER V.

MATCH-MAKING.

Poor Wolsey went off to encase himself in riding apparel, wondering, as he did so, why the deuce he couldn't be let alone.

They trotted along the lane and were soon in the open.

"Wolsey," said Chesterfield.

"Ay," answered Wolsey.

"I'll tell you afterwards why I ask the question: have you formed any plan of life for the future?"

"Plan! well, I was thinking, Chesterfield——"

"Yes, of what?"

"I was thinking it would be nice to run down to Winkle Bay just for a little."

"Ah! and after that?"

"I don't exactly know after that."

"What is your object in going to Winkle Bay?"

"Nothing. It's quiet, you know. I was sent there years ago, after I had the small-pox. I remember how quiet it was!"

"Isn't it quiet enough here? What the deuce do you want with quiet? Are you going to write a book?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Got some military problems in your head, perhaps?"

"No, no, Chesterfield."

"Then why do you talk so about quiet? One would think you had been half worked to death."

"I like to be quite quiet now and then."

"But what for, my dear fellow?"

"Can't tell really. One likes to meditate sometimes."

"Were you meditating when I came upon you in the shrubbery a while ago?"

"Yes, I was."

"Remember what about?"

"Oh yes. First I was trying to guess a riddle that was in the 'Weekly Entertainer.' Confounded deal too hard."

"Anything else?"

"Yea. I thought I would like to remember the list of our regiment as it was when first I joined." A pause. "I remembered the field-officers, of course. No difficulty there. And I made out all the subalterns, after a time. But the captains, I am sure there were twelve." Another pause. "I can only make out eleven, if my life depended on it. See now, there was Hickey and Brough—old Brough we called him—Hickey and Brough, and then came Yardley—course I couldn't forget Yardley—and Simpson. Hickey, Brough, Yardley, Simpson. Yardley was my own captain, you know, in those days. Commanded No. 3. Then——"

It is to be observed that, in delivering this twaddle, Sir Wolsey Salusbury did not behave as it is customary to suppose that silly people will act. Although he by no means enjoyed being catechised by his brother, he showed no sign of shrinking or awkwardness; and when he began to try his memory about the army list, he did not count on his fingers, or wag his head when his memory failed, as if he could shake the forgotten rolster out of it. On the contrary, he was calm and collected; he sat his horse neatly for a tall man; and his tone was measured, and seemed to indicate determination. Indeed, a deaf man, observing their demeanour, might have supposed that Chesterfield, with all the art of which he was master, was pressing a suit on his phlegmatic and strong-minded companion. But to return to the point where Chesterfield interrupted.

"Well, think of the captains another time," said he; "I want you to consider something else now. Don't you think that, instead of going to bury yourself at Winkle Bay, you would do well to think of settling yourself—taking a wife, you know?"

"Taking a wife?"

"Ay, taking a wife. There is nothing so odd in the notion. You are a baronet, you know, and you ought to be able to marry well."

"There's no estate, Chesterfield."

"Exactly. But don't you see that the title and your military figure together may sell for a wife and a good estate?"

"Humph!" said Wolsey; "is that a joke?"

"The devil a bit of a joke, my dear fellow. Sober earnest, and a matter that you ought to attend to. I have not the least doubt, Wolsey, that you may, if you look about you, secure an agreeable wife, a fine house, and a handsome estate."

"I should like a comfortable house, where I could be at my ease."

"Very few men know how to make a house really comfortable. Requires feminine skill to do that. I don't know how the house is to be got without the wife, and I'm sure it would not be one-tenth as valuable to you without her as with her."

"Women are restless and dissipated."

"Some women."

Wolsey did not reply—did not seem to care about maintaining the conversation.

"Now, if only you could get a wife who would bring you a good house," went on Chesterfield, "and who would look after it, and keep everything snug and comfortable for you,—a woman of experience, you know—none of your silly, gaiety-loving girls, but a woman of mind and discretion, who would devote herself to your happiness,—wouldn't that be delightful?"

"Delightful," echoed Wolsey, with a sort of imperial smile, "if it could be done. Women may promise to be devoted, but they don't always turn out satisfactory."

"Damn him!" thought Chesterfield; "he's never fancying that he can be smart on me!" But another look at his brother, on whose serious features the imperial smile still lingered, reassured him as to the last remark having been entirely innocent of a second meaning, and he went on quite composedly.

"That's as may be, Wolsey. All the same, it was a shrewd remark of yours. But let us leave remarking on the sex in general, and come to particulars. What do you think of Mrs Bathurst?"

"Very delightful, well-bred woman."

"All that, and a good deal more. Clever, kind, good-looking, healthy, discreet, and the mistress of Traseaden Hall, with at least ten thousand a-year. Wouldn't she do for you?"

"Absurd. She wouldn't think of me."

"How can you possibly tell that? She might be made to think of you. But the present question is, Would you like to marry her?"

"I should. But it's very ridiculous."

"We shall see. You say you would like to marry her, and I must say I don't think you could do better. You might, perhaps, find it difficult to win her yourself, but I think I could guide you to success. What do you say? Shall we set about it?"

"Ah—yes—I suppose so," answered Wolsey.

"Well, you know, it's a matter about which we must be in earnest if we set about it at all. Can't be done for nothing. We must put money into it."

"Ah, then, that settles the point," answered Wolsey, with an air of solution such as might have sat well upon Archimedes or Euclid. "I've got no money to put; and I don't think you've got much just now, Chesterfield."

"That is quite true. You see the difficulty, but you don't see your way out of it. Don't you perceive that by winning the widow you would get money in plenty? It need not be paid till after your marriage."

"But I don't see how money can help at all."

"Don't you? Why, if you are to become intimate enough to establish a courtship, there must be entertainments, and all the expenses which they entail, besides dress, presents, and so on. There must be a little expenditure, too, of secret service money. We must buy the services of waiting-maids, stewards——"

"What, bribe?"

"Tut, no. Not that. But you know these dependants always expect to be fee'd when there is any great event in a family. Indeed, there are endless causes of expense when you woo a rich woman. Now, I am ready to undertake all that part of the matter—give my house and myself up to the business, and arrange the whole campaign, only it is reasonable that I should be afterwards reimbursed. Do you follow me?"

"Not about the reimbursement."

"That is to be after you have secured the widow and her fortune. It will be easy enough then."

"She is to pay?"

"If you like to put it that way. But really you will pay between you. You will both have been made happy."

"Will she agree?"

"Pshaw! we can't very well ask her when she has to be wooed and won. But, no doubt, she'll be well satisfied to pay up once the marriage shall have taken place. You can undertake to pay now, and she can know all about it when the time comes."

"I shan't marry her," said Wolsey.

"But, damn it, you must marry somebody."

"Not if I am to promise you her money."

"Oh, I see! Yes, yes. Perhaps you are right, although everybody wouldn't be so scrupulous. Now, then, look here. You know that when we were jotting up the remains of the family property, there were two or three possible sums which might be realised if certain papers should turn up, and a debt or two due to the last baronet should be paid."

"Yes"

"I make these altogether somewhere about nine thousand pounds. Your half-pay commission is worth another thousand. There are ten thousand. You have a perfect right to dispose of that without consulting anybody. Now, give me your undertaking for ten thousand, and I'll manage everything for you."

"And if I don't marry?"

"Then I shan't ask for the money."

"But you will have the agreement. Somebody else may ask for it."

"What a shrewd one you are, Wolsey!" exclaimed Chesterfield, who now saw a great probability that he would carry his point. "Well, look here, if there be no marriage the bargain shall be null. There, will that do? We'll have it all regularly drawn up, as you are so sharp; and if your own money doesn't come in, of course you can't pay."

"No, I can't," said Wolsey, who was glad to bring the conference to an end on any terms, as he felt quite exhausted with it.

"Enough, then," said Chesterfield; "I will see to our bargain being noted in due form. And mind you must attend to the directions I shall give you in making your court to her; but I shan't trouble you with more conversation now. We'll just have a gallop that I may see how young Tierney goes, and then back to our friends."

This was the bargain which afterwards took the form of a bond in which the widow's name prominently appeared. Chesterfield would have made it an absolute engagement to pay him the money at a given date; but Wolsey, quite justifying the proverb that a fool has often spoken to the purpose, would

not execute an instrument by which he might be shorn of all he had if he didn't get his wife. The truth was, that the men of his regiment, seeing that Wolsey wasn't overburdened with brains, had taken some pains to caution him concerning the subscription of his name on any document, and the difficulties that might follow if any paper were incautiously signed; indeed, he had been shown examples in plenty of this great folly. But his unwonted cleverness in resisting an absolute bond compelled the insertion of the conditions, and made the engagement conspicuously contingent on the marriage then in contemplation.

Lawyers were employed, neither of whom seemed to see anything very extraordinary in the covenant. Wolsey was assisted by the attorney who had done business for the late baronet, and Chesterfield had the services of a person who had helped him in many a money matter before.

Chesterfield gave no hint to his brother of the widow's favourable regard of him, but recommended him to be studiously deferential, and to throw some warmth into his manner when he addressed her, but not to make his devotions too frequent, as women of wit and discernment were not to be won by speeches and endless attentions, but rather by a manly bearing and a discriminating and therefore appreciative courtship. Of course the object of this was to prevent his brother from falling in her good opinion. But whatever might have been Chesterfield's motive, he could have devised no better scheme of proceedings. That he was not to be troubled with perpetual love-making, more than anything reconciled Wolsey to the affair; while the increased regard which he showed for her was just sufficient to fan the flame which was already consuming the widow, and to put her on her mettle.

When Chesterfield saw that the barb was in, he separated the parties, and for a time allowed them to meet only in public; then he brought them together again under the same roof, and prescribed to his brother a somewhat increased amount of ardour. The widow herself now assembled some friends at Traseaden Hall, and prepared a great entertainment, to which, of course, the Salusbury party were invited, and here Chesterfield executed his master-stroke. Mrs Salusbury could not accept the invitation on account of the state of her health—nobody was surprised at her declining; but what must have been Mrs Bathurst's chagrin when she understood that Sir Wolsey Salusbury, who had accepted at first, was also obliged to forego the honour and felicity of waiting on her, he having been summoned to London on professional business of importance!

Chesterfield, whose influence with people in office has been mentioned, had quite made himself acquainted with the military position which Wolsey occupied since his retirement from his regiment. If there was anything wrong, he found that it could be got over. The regiment rather liked Wolsey, and knew his weakness. If, therefore, there had been any little scandal before he left, his brother officers made no exposure of the affair. And it was apparent that Wolsey, even on half-pay, was eligible for certain appointments, which might be lucrative or not, but which at any rate would give him some standing in the service. Now, at the last Parliamentary election Chesterfield had had much pleasure in assisting General the Honourable Hotspur Muffe, who was not the popular candidate, but who was backed by court influence, and by the long purse of the Earl his brother, and, strange to say, was returned for Tipwick, though not by a large majority. Chesterfield at the election, where he was of much use to the General, was struck by a stone,—there is some reason to believe that he instructed the person who threw it, and that it did not injure him seriously,—about which he made a fuss, keeping his bed for a week, and being visited by a surgeon twice a-day. The General felt greatly obliged, and, in the fervour of his gratitude, said he only wished he might some day be able to do a kindness in return. Now, General the Honourable Hotspur Muffe was governor of Blowyness Castle.

Blowyness Castle was a ruinous old work, somewhere on a dreary part of the east coast of England, not a vestige of which remains to this day. The General derived emolument as well as dignity from his office; it was an office that sounded well, that of governor of a castle, and he had the privilege of appointing his lieutenant-governor; for, though the tumble-down castle was of no manner of use, it had a large staff of officials belonging to it, none of whom, except the very humblest, ever saw the fortalice in which he had nominal charge. If any man were ignorant and perverse enough to ask what was the use of keeping up unmeaning appointments like this, the answer was that His Majesty was graciously pleased by means of such to signify his appreciation of the meritorious services of officers who could not be employed in the field. General Muffe had never crossed the seas which bound this island, and his services had been principally in the House of Commons, where he sat and voted always on the Ministerial side. His lieutenant-governor, Major Offalheim, had had the merit of being brother—certainly half-brother—of the Countess Von Diepliseult, who, again, had the merit of being very much admired by His

Majesty George the Second of happy memory. He was a very old officer, and might at any moment leave the lieutenant-governor's place vacant by his to be lamented death.

When, therefore, General Muffe was so profuse in offers of service, Chesterfield Salusbury, who knew when to strike at an iron, was profuse in his regrets that the General should suppose that a return of good offices could be acceptable to him, or that he (Chesterfield) should be imagined to have befriended the Honourable Hotspur from any but the most benevolent and unselfish motives. The General said he knew, and he thought Chesterfield himself must know, that the latter's character stood too high for a suspicion of self-interest to attach to him; but the General felt a weight of obligation, and it would be a kindness if Chesterfield would do his own feelings the violence of allowing the weight to be lessened. Chesterfield was very loth, but he felt compelled to meet the General's wish so graciously expressed. For himself he must positively decline to ask anything; but he had a brother, the present baronet, a tried soldier, whose services the country was deprived of through his being accidentally on half-pay. His brother could aspire to no higher honour than serving under General the Honourable Hotspur Muffe. The lieutenant-governorship of Blowyness Castle must be vacant shortly. Would the General bear Sir Wolsey Salusbury in mind when such a contingency might occur?

The General only regretted that he could not that minute offer the place to Sir Wolsey. He would note the request, or rather, as he was pleased to call it, the permission which he had received from his good friend Salusbury, and only hoped that circumstances would enable him shortly to make the appointment. But Major Offalheim had all his life been remarkable for tenacity, and the manner in which he kept his hold of this mortal life was no exception to his general conduct. The election was some time past, there was no prospect of another at present, and the General's gratitude might be cooling. Chesterfield had not the same fear of the Honourable Hotspur's penetration that he had of the Widow Bathurst's; and he thought it might not be an impolitic thing to let the General see his brother, whose soldierlike appearance would be sure to tell in his favour, and whose visit would serve as a reminder of the promise. Two birds, as the proverb says, would be killed by one stone, if Wolsey's visit to London were made exactly at the time of the widow assembling the party at her house. The little bit of business with the General would be accomplished, and Mrs Bathurst's heart would be reduced to

exactly the condition to fit it for the next and important move which Chesterfield meditated.

"You don't seem much to fancy this visit to Traseaden, Wolsey?" said Chesterfield one day.

"Well, another time I might be much delighted with it," answered Wolsey, "but you see I have so many things to think of just now. I wish you had not made such a point of my going."

"My dear fellow, I make a point of nothing that is disagreeable to you. The widow should see you, not when you are overwhelmed with business, but when your mind is perfectly free and unburthened. If you really think that at present you would not appear to the best advantage, on no account go."

Wolsey, unexpectedly reprieved at the foot of the gallows, as it were, was unable to believe in his good fortune. He did not, however, indulge in any unseemly demonstration of relief. No man could learn from his bearing whether he might be stifling a heart-pang or rejoicing as one of those who divide the spoil. "Unfortunately I have accepted," said he. "Wish I'd known before what you thought."

"Yes, you can't be off now—except—except—for a very pressing reason. If you could plead military duty now; everything would give place to that."

"Ah! but I can't."

"Well, I don't know. What do you think of this?" And Chesterfield explained to Wolsey how desirable it was that he should make the acquaintance of General the Honourable Hotspur Muffe, also how entirely the widow must approve of a proceeding which was likely to lead to a staff appointment. Wolsey inquired how long his interview with the General would last, and was told that it might be over in half an hour, unless they should be so much taken with each other as to desire further communications. Whereupon Wolsey felt it his duty to go to town, and despatched a note which had been dictated by his brother, containing his apology for failing to appear at Traseaden according to engagement.

CHAPTER VI.

FROM DESPAIR TO FRUITION.

It required all the good sense and strength of will of the mistress of Traseaden Hall to enable her to bear herself with

dignity, and to entertain her guests with cheerfulness, under this disappointment. But she did, at some cost to herself, go through her duties creditably. Chesterfield explained to her that his brother's visit to town—he made it appear that Wolsey had been summoned thither—would probably lead to his being made a lieutenant-governor, which, as she thought, sounded very well; but then how cruel, how distracting was it, that, when all the weeks in the year were available for this odious military work, her soldier should be called away on this particular occasion, when she had counted upon enjoying his society in her own mansion, and had imagined how events, of she didn't know what important and joyous character, might be brought about from the opportunities and combinations of the visit!

Sometimes she would be angry with Sir Wolsey, who could, she was certain, have contrived to change the date of his going to town, if he had really felt for her as she would fain believe that he felt; and then, again, she would be angry with herself for doing him the injustice of supposing that he, thorough soldier as he was, and wedded to his profession, would, for any private object however dear to him, postpone for an hour a call of duty. She would persuade herself that this untoward absence would be decisive of her fate—that the happy result which might have been under more propitious circumstances was now out of the question, or could only be brought about by some lucky chance, which it would be folly to expect. She would determine to think no more of an affair to which fate was contrary, and then catch herself musing extravagantly on scenes wherein her hero was the prominent figure. Oh, this hope deferred, this frustration of a cherished plan, they exercised the mind unmercifully, and were hard to bear!

But she had a smile for every guest, and was ready with a witticism or a reflection, the only difference in her sallies being that they were rather more bitter than they were wont to be. Little periods of abstraction there were, when she would sit with her eyes fixed, unconscious of her surroundings; and during one of these, Chesterfield, who watched her narrowly, saw two pearly drops make their way to her cheeks. She became conscious of her pensiveness before it had lasted long, and then was more animated than usual. The comfort and amusement of her guests she looked to personally; indeed, she spared no effort to conceal, if she could not assuage, her pain. Such was her burden during the day, when she could resist and defy it. But the burden surely got its turn in the darkness and solitude of the night: it pressed her down then, and she

could not resist ; it revenged itself savagely. Why, she would ask herself as she tossed on her sleepless pillow, why had she ever seen this man ? She had suitors in plenty before, but her heart was not touched any more than Penelope's. Her life was tranquil, she thought she had all she desired, and was content. She had become acquainted with one fatal being, and everything had changed to her view. That which delighted before could charm no longer. Things were the same in themselves and to other people, but to her how different ! "Farewell the tranquil mind ; farewell content."

Depression would thus have its hour, and then she, being a brave woman, would turn and grapple with her grief. Others had courageously submitted to a cruel fate ; why, then, could not she ? Hundreds were condemned to move about the world with serene faces who had vultures gnawing them within. Should she show less fortitude than they ? There might be a satisfaction in overcoming her care. This, and not pleasure, was the gratification of heroic minds. The very rod with which she was chastised might be made a salve for the stripes. This was the jewel which lay in the head of the toad, ugly and venomous ; this was a harmless application of "evil, be thou my good." She would fight out her fight in secret, fight it with fortitude, and let the fight be the main business of her life.

"All going right, by [not] George," Chesterfield said to himself. "Devilish fine study this. Shall profit by it, if that infernal old wife of mine gives me the chance." Chesterfield was conducting this courtship, using his brother as an instrument. The game was altogether to his liking. He threw out vague hints that Wolsey might get his business over before the party broke up, and would then come late to his trysts, as fast as post-horses could bring him. But he took good care that this should not be the case. He only used the suggestion to keep up a love-ripening alternation of hope and disappointment in the widow's breast. When it was over, when the prolongation of the festivities had been in vain, and Wolsey had made no appearance, she bade Chesterfield adieu with a steady countenance, and charged him with a coquettish message of reprimand to his brother, while all the time, as Chesterfield knew, she thought her heart must break.

Wolsey had been directed to come home, and at home Chesterfield found him on his return. "Now then," said Chesterfield, "the corn is ripe ; we must put in the sickle before it begins to wither." And he sat down and composed a letter as from one who, having been long detained by imperative duty, and having

worthily performed the same, would now give his liberated heart up to its darling desire. There was poignant regret for the breach of his engagement, a wail over the delight which he had been disappointed of, and a still deeper wail over the thought that he might have incurred the disfavour of her whom all his sex was seeking to please, and for whose smile he would—then there was a passionate abrupt cessation of this strain, as if the ardour of the writer could no longer be repressed from breaking forth in plain language. He had but one desire now on earth. He placed himself and all that was his at her feet. He entreated her to raise him up with an assurance that she would make him the happiest of men. He scarcely hoped to have deserved her love, but she could pity, he knew she could, and she would not consign him to a hopeless, aimless life of wretchedness. He should know no rest until she deigned to send him a favourable answer, and to bid him live.

The widow, after the departure of her guests, had been dejected in the extreme. Sighs expired continually from her fair breast. She could not take her food. Her books, her harpsichord, were alike distasteful to her. She would go abroad in her coach, not seem to know what orders to give the coachman, and then, when she had driven a quarter of an hour, desire the horses' heads to be turned homewards. Only for shame, and for the disorder it would cause in her household, she would have shut herself in her chamber and pined. For hours she could find consolation in nothing; then at last she thought she would put on record her grievous suffering, as many a martyr had done before her, and she sat at her desk with that intent, when suddenly she felt a desire to express her feelings in verse, and she actually composed three or four pieces, stamped with genuine sentiment, and with the marks of a cultivated mind. She spoke of the cruel caprice of fate which had kept separate two people capable of appreciating and making happy each other, while it was daily and hourly bringing together the most unsympathetic couples; and she noted the evils of these unhappy unions, and compared them with the delights which she might have enjoyed with her chosen. Then she sung of war, its terrors (her chords having an advantage over those of Anacreon, and being able to discourse of something besides love) and its glories, and she pictured her hero struggling and at length victorious in the fight, while she, "of ladies most deject and wretched," in her lonely tower secretly rejoiced in his fame—her only joy. Anon she imagined how, after long years and strange vicissitudes, chance might once more bring together her and

her renowned warrior, by that time one of the exalted ones of the earth; she wrote of herself as old, worn, grey, but bearing yet fresh in her heart the dear affection which had brightened and saddened also, alas, alas! days of old.

She was sitting next day with her face to the window sadly perusing her elegies of the day before, and imagining little changes in the words which might improve the verse, when the footfalls of a horse at speed were heard, and presently a courier,

"Bloody with spurring, fiery red with haste,"

reined up his smoking steed at the door. The incident startled her a little, but she scarcely had time to think what might be the occasion of it, when a packet containing Sir Wolsey Salusbury's letter was placed in her hands, the servant who presented it saying as he did so, "From Ruddilands, madam."

Ruddilands was the name of Mr Chesterfield Salusbury's residence. She had not a suspicion of what the despatch contained, but the bare arrival of a missive from the house on one of the inmates of which her thoughts had been so fastened, made her heart throb violently. Her impulse was to tear open the packet, but a conscious feeling of the emotion she might display caused her to turn and bid the domestic withdraw. The man lingered as if there were something which it behoved him to say; but the tone and manner of his mistress were so peremptory that he retreated at once. Now she drew the letter from its envelope and began to read it.

One may judge of her emotion as she read on.

The sudden transition from misery to joy is trying to all of us. A weak woman, wrought on as Mrs Bathurst was, would undoubtedly have experienced much damage from the shock. She, self-controlled as she was, felt a rising in her throat, and a desire to throw herself on a couch, as if the tidings were too much for her brain to comprehend, and a period of unconsciousness were almost necessary before she could realise the altered state of things. But she knew the danger, and above all things endeavoured to compose herself. She read Wolsey's letter once more,—she could not help doing that,—and then, certain that the joy was real, placed the packet in her dress out of sight, nerved herself to an outward condition of calmness, and rang the bell. When it was answered—

"The rider from Ruddilands need not return immediately, I presume?"

"I was to tell you, madam, that he is to take his orders from you about returning."

"Then let him be well lodged and cared for. He shall know later what my wishes are. I require the coach as soon as possible."

The air of the room was stifling her. She must be abroad, and in motion. She desired to be driven over a long round of country, and that the coach should move rapidly. Reclined in the carriage, and rolling along the roads, she sought to calm the tumult in her breast, and to familiarise herself with the new-born joy.

Let us say no more of the course of emotions in her mind; they can better be imagined than learned from narration. Had Sir Wolsey's proposal been made in what may be called the natural course of things—that is to say, as the outcome of a close and persistent courtship—it is probable that the widow would not have yielded at once; certainly she would not have yielded "but with proviso and exception." But the glimpse of despair which she had endured warned her not to tamper with the offered good, but frankly and thankfully to accept it.

Not her first nor her second draught of an answer satisfied her. Nevertheless, an acceptance, couched in very becoming terms, was returned by her next day; and the air around her, which had been so oppressed with gloom, was now lit up with rays brighter than those of the sun, the beams with which hope and joy can illuminate all objects on the darkest day. She whose despondency had led her to fill her mind with visions of loneliness and age, was now exalted to realms of rosy delight, borne up, as it were, on the wings of a dove that is covered with silver wings and her feathers like gold!

The game, Chesterfield now saw, was all but won. He had but to proceed a little farther with his usual caution, and the prize would be secured. It would be unprofitable to follow him through all his further tactics, although some of his later moves did not at all yield in cleverness to those which have been related; suffice it to say that he kept the veil still over the widow's perception, and stimulated his brother to the animation and exertion required to bring matters to effect. He was rather foiled as to his designs upon the property, for a near relation of the lady, who was summoned from somewhere in the north to be present on the occasion, insisted upon the whole of the estate being absolutely secured to herself. He was obliged to submit to this drawback, but in all other respects he may be said to have been eminently successful. The marriage was solemnised with grandeur and much rejoicing, and the happy pair fled away far into the country. Mr Sheridan, to whom Chesterfield related in detail the game which he had played,

said that it was a perfect comedy, and declared his intention of dramatising the story; but he forgot to do this as completely as if it had been the payment of one of his debts.

CHAPTER VII

REALISATION—PAYING THE SCOT.

There is such a thing as ceasing from a dream of purple youth, and gauzy scenes, and silver sounds, and opening the mind's eye upon a world of dreary realities, which are only ten times more appalling for the rapture of the vision. The widow had had her beatific trance; she was not long after the marriage in recognising the dread reality. Her hero, her sage, her admirable, out of what trumpery was formed this counterfeit presentment of a man! The gradual unfolding of the truth was terrible. It was accomplished at last, and the distress and disappointment of the poor woman were such as it is a pain to think of. But the evil was past mending, and she bewailed her own folly, her own blindness, her own wilfulness, but did not attempt to cast the blame on Fortune.

Vain was it, and she knew that it was vain, to give way to repining; it would be impious, she thought, to harden her heart, snatch what little good she might yet snatch for herself from existence, and despise the unfortunate being to whom she had linked herself. She had many an anxious communing with herself, no doubt; she passed through a great many variations of opinion and intention; but out of the waters of her affliction she emerged at last, true, brave, enlightened as to her duty. She accepted her condition, not in obduracy and bitterness, but as one which should be her study, which should call forth her energies, and which might in that way, by the help of Heaven, bring a blessing even yet.

Human nature, when afflicted, refuses to be comforted. One of its weaknesses is to make the most of every cross—to shut out all joy because it is denied the particular joy on which its affections are set. But surely this is a distemper the cure of which is worthy of our greatest and continued efforts. Neither religion nor philosophy will give to it the least countenance; yet devout men, and philosophers too, have been known to cherish their griefs and to curse their day, when after all, the

day, impartially looked at, was not so hopelessly dark. The new Lady Salusbury, late the Widow Bathurst, was, in most senses of the epithet, a discreet woman. Her good sense, it is true, did not at the first enable her to make the best of her lot. She compared the estate at which she had arrived with that which she had pictured. She saw her future a hopeless blank, and was miserable. A better disposition was, however, sure to come to a good and honest mind, and it came to hers. She passed from despair to a condition of unnatural activity and energy. She desired, in a tempest of effort, to deaden her senses to a perception of the present. Good works were her occupation. She sought out and relieved distress, and in doing so realised the truth that she did not suffer alone nor in the intensest degree. In reasoning with others for their comfort, she invented comfort for herself. How could she bid a sufferer to be of good cheer, to look on the bright side, and obdurately refuse to recognise a bright side in her own case?

The time came when she was able to balance the awards made to her. She took account of her goods as well as of her ills. She felt rebuked when she looked at the register. While eagerly desiring more and unattainable blessings, she had wilfully shut her eyes on, and repudiated, the blessings already were hers. And the lesson which she learned was, that a due sense of the good which has been allotted to us is as valuable and as well worth seeking as the good itself. We cannot help entertaining unwarrantable, or unreasonable, or hastily formed expectations; our nature, or our adversary, will be sure to suggest those; but we may, with great profit, train ourselves to look on the other side of the reckoning.

She made the acquaintance of women, some of them poor, broken-down beings, who were married to vicious, or brutal, or heartless men. Something had to be said to them all to bespeak their patience, and every word that was spoken seemed to lighten the misfortune at Traseaden Hall. Sir Wolsey Salusbury was not the man that she had chosen to believe him, but he could hardly be called a bad man. Bright he certainly was not, but he was teachable. According to his lights, he was upright and loyal. Even affectionate he might possibly be made by one who had patience to study him. His fine person and air were still things to be admired. He had deceived her, she said at first. Yet, on looking back calmly on things, she could not substantiate this accusation. She had deceived herself, she feared. And yet, somehow, she could not help feeling that she had been deceived. However, she acquitted Sir Wolsey as to this. And now that she had got this somewhat heavy-going husband, why

was she to sit down and mourn all her life ? Could nothing be done at home in the way of charity as well as out of doors ? There are few of human kind so bad that they cannot be improved. It was a new idea ; it pleased her.

She had been, as it were, cultivating indifference ; she now gave up that culture and began to observe her husband. He was not altogether a delightful study, it was true. There was a great deal in him that was frivolous and tiresome, but he responded at once if any attention were paid to his ease and little fancies. The shrewd lady, as soon as she began to reflect, perceived how very little indulgence a nature like Wolsey's could have known in his father's house, where keen, unscrupulous, though somewhat polished grasping was the order of the day ; or in the army, where a man's wits and limbs must always be ready at call, where much that is rough and uncongenial has daily to be borne, and where there is more toleration for anybody than for a dullard.

Carrying these thoughts into act, she speedily took such order that the baronet had more comfort in his life than he had ever known. It did not require much penetration to discover who was his best and truest friend ; and Sir Wolsey's entire confidence and dependence were won readily. This was the lady's first reward ; and a great encouragement it was to her. She having established her sway, it would be hard but she would use it for his improvement. Her task, she perceived, was facilitated by the anti-chattering disposition of her spouse. With the greatest caution, she led him to show himself in the hunting-field and other ways in public ; he appeared on the bench at quarter-sessions as a grave and sagacious deputy-lieutenant ; in amusements (which were always managed so as not to bore him) he took his part readily, sometimes enjoying them much. Lady Salusbury perceived that the world at large still took her husband for that which she first had supposed him to be. Though *she* had discovered that his ring was not perfect, he passed current as he had done before.

Fortunately, things had got into a very easy groove before Chesterfield began to intimate that he would be glad to receive the amount secured to him by his bond. He gave a hint or two to Wolsey just to open the matter, and Wolsey told him that nothing at all had been realised on account of the debts due to his predecessor, but that he would dispose of his half-pay commission and make over the proceeds to his brother. But to this Chesterfield objected that it would completely frustrate the plan of having Sir Wolsey made lieutenant-governor of Blowyness Castle, and that it would give him but a tithe of his claim

—a composition of it to which he could not think of agreeing. “There need not be any delicacy *now*,” said Chesterfield; “ask your wife for the money.” “No,” said Wolsey, “it was arranged that it was to be paid out of the property of our own house.” “Ass!” thought Chesterfield, “it is useless to talk to him, and if I am not quick, he’ll sell out of the army, which I don’t want.”

The aggrandisement of the family was a principle, or rather a passion, with Chesterfield. He wanted his brother to be a lieutenant-governor, and a governor too, perhaps, by and by. He wanted to keep up his connection with the Honourable Hotspur Muffe and his noble family, and he saw what he took to be a much better method of getting his ten thousand pounds than blocking his brother’s course to any small honour that might be within his reach.

He took an early opportunity of remarking to Lady Salusbury how happy and contented his brother seemed to be, and how very fortunately he had settled in life. To this her ladyship made a proper answer; and then he went on, as if half in soliloquy, “Looks down, I warrant you, on a poor devil like me.” She hastened to repudiate any such feeling, and protested that the baronet was attached to, and proud of, his relations.

“Ah, perhaps, perhaps,” Chesterfield went on, half-musing; “the observation has been made before, that men, when they become prosperous, are forgetful of former obligations, which then to them seem small and inconsiderable.”

“The observation has been made, certainly, Mr Salusbury, but I am sure that it does not apply generally. You can have no just reason for supposing that your brother’s mind towards his relations has in any way changed since his fortune has improved.”

“Ah, well, let us change the subject.”

“It is not an indifferent subject, which I can dismiss in that way. I am sure you wrong your brother.”

“I trust that you are right. He only forgets, I daresay. That’s all.”

“You speak as if you had some sense of injury.”

“Not at all, not at all.”

“You surely do not mean, Mr Salusbury, that there is any money obligation unsettled between you?”

“Oh dear, I mean nothing, positively nothing. Something will stir Wolsey’s recollection one of these days, and then everything will come round again.”

“You make me very uneasy, Mr Salusbury.”

"I would not do that, madam, for ten times the amount. I feel that I have let fall some hasty expressions. Consider them unsaid, I entreat. Hah! I hear a coach. There are visitors arriving, no doubt. They are rather early; but, oh dear! no, it is I that have been forgetful. Your ladyship does not allow one to take note of time."

Of course Chesterfield did not intend that the above conversation should be forgotten. "They will come to explanations now," thought he. "I rather pity poor Wolsey, but it can't be helped. If he had trusted to me, I'd have pulled him through."

They came to explanations, certainly. Sir Wolsey made a much cleaner breast than Chesterfield expected. He told the whole story, and wound up with saying, "It is only a family matter, you know, my love. Chesterfield must wait for most of the money until some debts due to the estate come in; and I am going to sell my half-pay commission, and that will be all. I am sorry you know anything of the matter."

Now, as has been said already, Lady Salusbury felt that many transactions which preceded the marriage had been unfair. Lately, while looking back in a calmer spirit than was possible in the early days of her disappointment, she perceived traces of Chesterfield's manœuvring. She suspected how it came about that she had so little of her husband's company during his courtship; and she was very angry with her brother-in-law, whose character, as it gradually opened to her view, she regarded with some contempt. This story of the bond raised her indignation to such a degree that she could with difficulty control herself. She saw the whole matter in the worst possible light. Chesterfield had devised and brought about the marriage solely as a means of obtaining ten thousand pounds of her money, which was not exactly the case. Chesterfield had made merchandise of her happiness and her affections. Reckless of all consequences to her, he had plunged her into a connection which might have been a life-long misery. No thanks were due to him that it was not so. Oh the depth of villany, the cool, calculating cruelty that this wretch had displayed!

Lady Salusbury forgot how ready she had been in bestowing her admiration; and, of course, she never knew that, but for the betrayal of her own weakness, Chesterfield would never have had the hardihood to frame his scheme at all. It was impossible that she could comprehend the man, but not impossible that she should see all the worst points in his behaviour, and that she should condemn these as atrocious and without parallel. No rascal figuring in history or fiction was, to her mind, of a deeper dye than her brother-in-law, Mr Salusbury.

It was some days before Lady Salusbury could trust herself to take any action in regard to this affair, so deeply were her feelings touched. As soon as she became somewhat composed, she directed her man of business to make inquiry about the bond, and to convey to Mr Salusbury that she would consider and dispose of the claim which, as she understood, he made against her husband. Her attorney met the two attorneys who had drawn the indenture. The nature and tenor of it were made quite clear to her. Her husband was certainly bound. Whether the law would recognise a bond of that nature was, as she was advised, a question; but, putting that question aside, the money was now due. Hereupon Lady Salusbury caused the money to be paid, Sir Wolsey concurring; and Chesterfield's acknowledgment for the ten thousand pounds was obtained.

Lady Salusbury desired to see Chesterfield in the presence of her man of business, and of his own adviser, if he wished the latter to be present. Chesterfield thought it the most prudent course to agree to the interview, which accordingly took place. She told him, in the hearing of the two legal gentlemen, that for his brother's sake and for the credit of the family, she would not create any open breach between the brothers, if he chose to continue to be on the same terms as formerly at Traseaden Hall, and that she would receive him there with courtesy. But she must tell him that she had become acquainted with his devices, which she now thoroughly comprehended; that his conduct had been base, treacherous, and venal; that she regarded him with contempt and loathing; and that he might rely upon her preventing, by every means in her power, any further attempt of his to gain money from her estate.

Chesterfield made a polite and jaunty answer, though he winced a little at her words. He pretended to impute her anger to the loss of the money, and to treat the whole matter as one of ordinary business. As she had been pleased to say that she did not insist on an enduring rupture, he should not be too resentful of this, not perhaps unnatural, feminine ebullition, and should not bear malice. His feelings, as has been shown, were not very acute, and he was glad to be through the business, and to have got his money with so little trouble, and only a scolding. He told the story—he generally told the stories of smart actions of his own—to Mr Sheridan, and remarked that the lady was very tart in her remarks; that, egad, a thin-skinned man might have considered her severe, but he supposed the loss of her money had excited her. To which Mr Sheridan was pleased to reply that the Retreat of the Ten Thousand had always been an exciting theme.

"I'll forgive her the abuse," said Chesterfield, "provided she brings my brother no son."

"Good," replied Mr Sheridan; "she may give herself airs, but must give none to the baronet."

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed Chesterfield; "'pon my life, it's a privilege and a treat to exchange half-a-dozen words with you. Heira, ha! Exquisite! exquisite!"

"You over-rate my observations," Mr Sheridan once more remarked; "a single *deed* of yours was worth more than all the words I utter on one of my most loquacious evenings. You have got the widow's cruse; but I must go and cruise among the tables, as I have not a brother to dispose of."

On tracing the events in this simple story, it is easy to perceive that the course of them was very favourable to the persons chiefly interested. Lady Salusbury had experienced a little mental discipline, and had accepted her position and begun to make her husband her chief concern before the bond came to light. Had she known of it while she was yet impatient of her lot, and resentful at the deceit in which she believed Sir Wolsey to be implicated, it is probable that the document might have caused a lasting estrangement. But at the time of the discovery she was already softened enough to lend a favourable ear to his ingenuous confession. Not only did she acquit him of all evil intention in the matter, but she regarded him as a fellow-sufferer with herself, and the incident increased rather than diminished the devotion which she felt towards him. The union, at one time so inauspicious, proved a happy one for both.

The lines could not have fallen to Sir Wolsey in pleasanter places. He was indulged in every reasonable fancy, and taught to show himself to the best advantage. He developed his talent for whist at this period, and soon began to be spoken of as a bright example of what a steady player ought to be, and even as an authority as to the game. To him it was a happiness to have some one to think for him and to direct all his conduct. He was in a state of willing tutelage; he allowed this to be seen sometimes, but she never showed that she ruled. Of course, among those who saw much of the baronet, it was impossible to keep up the illusions about his prudence, capacity, and so forth. But the reaction was not at all violent; and such was the state of feeling, that nobody was at all anxious to demonstrate or to dwell upon the clay which composed the idol. It was rather in undertones and with a feeling of regret that neighbours would confess one to another that Sir Wolsey was not Solomon or Socrates, nor even so wise as he looked.

It was only in very private meetings that wits dared to take him as a subject for their jokes; and, as has been already intimated, the story about misbehaviour in the field could never be openly talked of, and was so little relished that its truth or falsehood was not established, and it remains a perplexity unto this day.

Weak people in conspicuous positions do not generally experience such lenient treatment. Sir Wolsey's good fortune arose in great measure from his golden gift of holding his tongue. But that was not all. If he was a little below the mark as to vigour of mind and body, his wife was very much above the level commonly occupied by ladies of those days. Her tact and cleverness, and genuine good nature, compensated for his shortcomings; and, as a married couple, they had between them quite the average wit of the compound human being.

Lady Salusbury felt more than the Widow Bathurst had done, that it was incumbent on her to be watchful in all she did, and to retain the favourable regard of all who knew them. As time wended along with them, it became rather the fashion to say that Sir Wolsey had been in his early days a man of marked ability, but that he had rather overtaxed his energies (being very ardent and unselfish), and was now suffering for his generosity. He became lieutenant-governor of Blowyness Castle, and enjoyed quite a string of minor honours. His shrievalty—for he served the office of high-sheriff in one of the counties of the Furze Range—was long spoken of as magnificent. In his court costume he was immensely admired; and the assize ball, at which Lady Salusbury was the chief personage, was immortalised in a painting by Mr Northcote, which may still be seen at Traseaden Hall.

It was for long a favourite anecdote among the squires, that a grand juror after dinner thought proper to say, in an apologetic manner, to one of the judges, that the sheriff was a man of sterling qualities, although he did not shine in conversation; and that his lordship replied, as he tossed off the last glass of his first bottle of port, "By ——" (oath which cannot be written), "sir, I think, as sheriffs go, that this county is damnably well off,"—which opinion, coming from so high a quarter, strengthened Sir Wolsey's reputation appreciably.

When it has been added that Lady Salusbury's hope of presenting her husband with an heir to his title was never fulfilled, nearly all that is here necessary will have been said of the history of the family at Traseaden Hall up to the time when her ladyship fell sick, and her illness afflicted the whole neigh-

bourhood. By that time the pair had grown elderly together, and while they did so events of great importance had been taking place in the world. The French Revolution had broken out, and England had gone to war with France. The trial of Mr Hastings had been commenced and prosecuted with more or less vigour, until at the end of seven years it died out. Chesterfield Salusbury had been a bitter opponent of the accused; but Lady Salusbury and Sir Wolsey, as a matter of course, took his part, and thought him hardly dealt with. Great Britain's naval glories were receiving bright additions. There was some disaffection in this country, which was made to appear more than it really was by the quantity that was said about it. But in truth the events of the time, which forced every one to take a side, increased and intensified loyalty and patriotism.

The antecedents of the story have now been told, and we may return to the period of Lady Salusbury's illness.

CHAPTER VIII

FRATERNAL ANXIETY—AN OMEN.

How is it that people like Chesterfield Salusbury are always made early aware of any circumstance which may affect their interest? The answer to the question will not be given here, and probably no answer that could be given would be generally satisfactory. Attention is at present asked, not so much to the reason or manner of their finding things out, as to the fact that they generally do find things out. Perhaps Nature, when she gives them their scheming dispositions, makes provision for keeping the same in action.

Chesterfield had had but little communication for some months with Traseaden Hall. Sir Wolsey, when his wife was taken ill, persuaded himself that she would soon recover, and did not make any announcement to his relatives. But Chesterfield happened to be in London; of course he was moving about among his acquaintances amusing himself, and doing here and there a stroke of business; and it happened that, while paying a visit, he sat near a lady who had married from the Furze Range. "So sorry, Mr Salusbury," said she, "to hear such indifferent news from Growinghamshire."

"I am sorry too, madam, inexpressibly so," answered Chester-

field, "for I presume that mischance in some form has befallen one of your house."

"You are always polite, sir, and I thank you much," answered the lady; "but the person for whom I expressed solicitude is a relation not of mine, but of yours. I referred to Lady Salusbury's illness."

"Oh, truly," answered Chesterfield, "but I trust that, ere this, that is wellnigh past."

"I rejoice to hear you say so, for I esteem her ladyship greatly. No doubt you have the latest and best intelligence. My letters spoke gravely, probably too gravely, of her case."

Chesterfield had never heard a word of the matter, but he immediately began to commune with himself as to this intelligence as he moved from house to house. The baronetcy was safe for him or his son, that was one comfort. Lady Salusbury had, at any rate, not done him the greatest injury possible. But, as he thought on, he remembered that he had been threatened with the retention of all Lady Salusbury's property in her own family. He had watched the deaths of her ladyship's relations as the lives dropped one after another, and had calculated that she might find it difficult to light on a blood relation near enough of kin to be made an heir of entail. Her anger had probably cooled by this, and she might meditate the giving of everything to her husband unconditionally. But Chesterfield was not the man to trust anything to its natural course, if he thought he could make assurance more sure by a little management. This matter must be looked to.

He relieved himself of further engagements in town, and started next morning for Growcester, where he thought he might hear if anything were in the wind likely to affect his prospects.

Arrived in the county town, he sent to ask Mr Sigil, the attorney and notary, whether he was likely to have communication soon with Traseaden Hall; and, if the answer to that were in the affirmative, whether he could forward thither a small parcel. Mr Sigil, with his best respects to Mr Salusbury, replied that it happened that he himself was going to wait on Lady Salusbury next Friday, and would be proud to be the bearer of the packet.

"Ho, ho," thought Chesterfield; "then I was right in attending to this matter. It looks as if something were being negotiated. Egad, I must examine a little more closely."

Mr Sigil received a note to inform him that Mr Salusbury had found a conveyance which would be at Traseaden before Friday, so he would not trouble Mr Sigil. And Chesterfield

himself started for the Hall, so as to reach it before the lawyer. It thus appears that the twenty years or so which had passed over him since he was first introduced into this narrative, had not much reduced his activity either of body or mind.

A mounted messenger preceded Chesterfield by a few hours, to warn Sir Wolsey of his coming. "Why did you not acquaint me," ran this epistle, "with your wife's very serious illness, that I might have been with you before? I heard of it by accident in London, and forthwith posted to Growcester, notwithstanding that the road is said just now to swarm with highwaymen. Do not fret her ladyship with the intelligence of a guest coming to the Hall. I hope to arrive quietly, and to be with you about three."

Now Sir Wolsey, though he found it extremely inconvenient to be without the direction of his wife, had never allowed himself to imagine that the inconvenience would be more than temporary. But the words of Chesterfield's letter caused his heart to sink within him to the very depths of his being, as it were. A horrible idea was presented to him, which seemed almost too dreadful for his mind to entertain. He saw the patient more than once every day, and he heard frequently the opinion of her medical attendant; Chesterfield never of late saw either the one or the other, and yet Chesterfield's view of the case made such a dread impression! Sir Wolsey remained for some time in his room almost stupefied. Then it occurred to him that Chesterfield might possibly be mistaken. But he could not feel easy on this score until he could hear Chesterfield himself admit that he must be mistaken. He longed for Chesterfield to arrive, that he might tell him all the arguments against the despondent forecast, and induce him to look cheerfully for the result.

Next to Chesterfield's revocation of his apprehension, Sir Wolsey thought he would be most comforted by the evidence of his own senses as to his wife's improved condition. He would probably not be able to spend much time with her in the afternoon, as he would be occupied with Chesterfield. So, if she was sitting up, and her room had been set in order, it would be very convenient to have a little chat with her now. To conceal the cause of his not visiting her in the afternoon, he had laid what had appeared to him a very profound plan. He would lead her to propose that he should ride somewhere, and he would agree to this; then Chesterfield and he might ride together.

Lady Salusbury, when he entered her room, was a little livelier than she had usually been of late, and the baronet felt

encouraged as soon as he saw her. Dorothy Clowance was with her,—had been with her through the past night,—and quite agreed that all the signs of the patient's condition were favourable.

"You were going to read to my lady, Dorothy, I daresay," observed Sir Wolsey; "but" (turning to his wife) "if you don't mind, my love, we can talk a little now, and the reading can be in the afternoon,—that is, after I am gone, you know."

"Oh, I don't know that we had thought of reading," answered Lady Salusbury. "I am feeling tolerably strong, and would prefer to talk a little. Have you any news to tell me, Sir Wolsey?" She knew that he hadn't. He never had.

"Well, nothing particular, I think, my dear." He felt burdened with the secret of Chesterfield's coming arrival, but managed to be reticent.

"Then I must furnish a subject of conversation. What do you think Curtis said to me a short time ago?"

"I can't think. I have not seen Curtis," answered he, with a look of sagacity such as *Œdipus* may have been distinguished by.

"Well, dear, Curtis says he thinks that after a little time I should go to the Bath. Do you like the idea?"

"As we shall both go, I think I do."

"It is a long time since we have been there. And I think Dorothy or Eleanor, or perhaps both, might accompany us and enjoy the season. You would like it, Dorothy?"

"Certainly," answered Miss Clowance. "It would delight me very much. You are very kind."

"Whist is much played at the Bath," observed the baronet, on whose mind the projected trip had taken some hold.

"You get every amusement there. It is quite a city of pleasure; and Curtis tells me the next season will be unusually gay."

"They have nice chairs in the park," said he.

"Yes. I suppose a chair will be my conveyance while I am there. But you will have to walk and ride, you know. By the by, have you taken the air to-day?"

"Not yet."

"But you will?"

"If you think I ought, certainly. I will ride my cob in the afternoon." This was Machiavellian.

Her ladyship nodded approval. Then she said, "While you are here, dear, I will just mention a little matter which I have arranged, that you may not be taken by surprise. I have sent for Mr Sigil to come to the Hall and talk to me."

"Mr Sigil!"

"Mr Sigil: yes. You know there have been so many sad changes among my relations, that my will as it stands scarcely has a meaning."

This touched the melancholy string in Sir Wolsey's heart, and brought back thither the boding thoughts which had been plaguing him that morning. The present interview had begun so cheerily, and now this gloomy suggestion! He did not speak for a space. When he had a little recovered himself, he said—

"Why do you think about your will, my love?"

"Positively, Sir Wolsey, you are quite aghast at my mention of Mr Sigil. You are as nervous as the two silly girls, Dorothy and Eleanor."

"I was flattering myself that you were so much better," said the heart-chilled baronet.

"And so I hope that I am, my love. It is *because* I have been feeling stronger and fitter for business that I have summoned Mr Sigil. Matters of importance should not be deferred until pain and weakness unsettle the mind."

Sir Wolsey sighed.

"I think, my dear," continued Lady Salusbury, "that if you happen to be communicating with any of your relations, it will be as well not to mention Sigil's visit. It will make them talk, and suspect, and report all sorts of things. Much better that they shouldn't know."

"Quite so." Sir Wolsey as he said this was dreadfully perplexed as to how he should prevent Chesterfield from discovering what was being done. To have such a task before him as keeping Chesterfield in the dark made him very unhappy.

"Half-past exactly," said Miss Clowance; "that is the time for the drops. Shall I get them?" Lady Salusbury said she would be much obliged by her doing so, and Dorothy went to a cupboard and opened it. Then suddenly she started back, saying, "Oh, there is the oddest sound! I can't think what it is; it is like a large clock ticking in the cupboard."

"Clock?" said Sir Wolsey; "there is no clock there."

"Do come and listen, Sir Wolsey. It is so strange."

Sir Wolsey raised himself very leisurely, but without appearance of impatience, and went toward the cupboard, saying as he did so, "Now then, you silly thing, we shall see what this dreadful clock is." The superior mind was about to examine the case.

"Ah, really now! 'Pon honour, my dear, there's something here, and it's as loud as the hall clock. Very remarkable!"

"Never mind," said Lady Salusbury, "there is nothing there that can hurt you, Dorothy. Won't you take the drops out?"

"Oh, certainly I will! But it is so strange; and I can see nothing. The bottle is just where I left it, at any rate." And Miss Clowance proceeded to mix and administer the drops. "Dear me, it has stopped!" she said, as she put the bottle back.

"Something was ticking there," said Sir Wolsey. I wonder what it was?"

"Oh, it was nothing!" Lady Salusbury said. "Something in the next room, perhaps. That cupboard runs back a long way."

Miss Clowance was going to add something more, but a sign from Lady Salusbury stopped her. Her ladyship then turned the conversation on some matters of small importance, and kept her husband amused until he went off to prepare, as he said, for his ride.

After he had left, Lady Salusbury appeared to be dozing—at any rate she was silent for some time. Anon she roused herself, and said gravely—

"Dorothy, can't you guess what that was in the cupboard?"

"What, the ticking? No, I can't think."

"My dear, I think I know."

"And it was?"

"You have heard of the death-watch, Dorothy?"

"Yes; it is mentioned in the story of 'Le Fevre.' They say it is all nonsense."

"A noise made by an insect, I believe. But, however, I remember that the same noise was heard in that cupboard once before,—indeed, I myself heard it then,—and that was just before my mother died."

"You don't believe that the noise had any connection with your mother's death?"

"Impossible, I should think. Simply a coincidence. Only I could not help remembering what occurred long ago, and feeling a disagreeable sensation as I did so."

"Endeavour to think no more of it. You said that I might read to you. The last 'Miscellany' has a memoir of Mr Burns the poet, who died last summer, and some short pieces, said to be his, but not before published. Perhaps you would like to hear them."

CHAPTER IX.

APPRAISING A LAWYER.

Sir Wolsey Salusbury had scarcely greeted his brother when he began to assail him with proofs that his wife's illness was not of so alarming a character as he appeared to think. Chesterfield said he was glad to hear it. He could not say less.

"You see you may have looked upon it as far more dangerous than it is, Chesterfield. You may have taken a wrong view. Don't you believe you may?"

"Yes, I do, Wolsey. I can believe anything of a woman's tenacity of life. I believe they would rise again with twenty mortal murders on their crowns, as Shakespeare said." Chesterfield's own patience had been sorely tried.

"She is quite cheerful to-day. Curtis thinks her decidedly better and stronger. He has proposed that she shall go to the Bath."

"I have no doubt that I was mistaken. Your wife will live thirty years longer—as long as you will." No advantage could come to Chesterfield until they were both dead, so he had no wish to hurry her ladyship, and he readily revoked his sentence.

"Thank you, Chesterfield." The latter part of the conversation occurred while they were at table, that Chesterfield might be refreshed after his journey. The meal over, Sir Wolsey proposed a ride, and the other assented.

"I don't want to suggest mournful thoughts," said Chesterfield as they rode along, "but you ought to see that Lady Salusbury leaves everything in her will in such a way as will show proper affection for yourself, and consideration for your rank."

"You admit," returned Wolsey, "that my dear wife is not alarmingly ill?"

"I do. I think she may live as long as you. But that is no reason why her will should not be properly made."

"Who need think of wills at present?"

"Somebody is thinking of a will, else what is Sigil to be here to-morrow for?"

"Sigil! who told you that he was coming?"

"He told me himself; and I assume that he is coming about the disposal of the property."

"My lady has constantly business to transact with Sigil," said Sir Wolsey evasively.

"Doubtless, and really his business cannot signify to me.

But I want you to see that you are properly treated in any testamentary provision that may be made."

"I am quite sure about that."

"You are sure that you will be well taken care of as long as you live; but that is not enough. It will have a very bad look if any arrangements which are to take effect after you should be named in the will."

"The property cannot be left absolutely at my disposal."

"In fact, no; certainly not. But it may be apparently so left in order to keep up your credit with the world. Then you can be charged with making the further bequests, and so on, don't you see? You can have a memorandum for your guidance in making your will. Comes to the same thing in the end, only in the one case your dignity is preserved, in the other you are treated like a dependant."

"You cannot expect that everything is to pass to our family."

"Expect, my dear fellow; what the deuce can I, or do I, expect? You will outlive me by many a year. Of course I expect nothing, but I do wish to let the world see that your wife had perfect confidence in you."

"If I am quite satisfied?"

"That is just it. You are a devilish deal too easily satisfied—too complaisant, by George. Now, I always find that when a man carries his obliging disposition too far, he gets no credit for it, but is only reputed a weak fellow."

Sir Wolsey did not reply, and after a short pause Chesterfield continued: "Don't you think it might be worth your while to be a little attentive to Sigil?"

"Sigil is always treated with proper respect."

"But you don't understand me. Sigil has a great deal in his power. A lawyer can draw an instrument so that it may read this way or that way."

"I am not afraid of Sigil; he is very honest," said Sir Wolsey.

"Damn you for a fool!" thought Chesterfield. "It's of no use trying to work him through you. I must assail him myself. He has his price, no doubt."

Sir Wolsey was sadly disturbed at the thought of his brother knowing about Sigil coming to them. He had not told Chesterfield, and therefore all would be well if he could only tell the whole story to his wife; but, confound it, Chesterfield would not have it known that he was in the house, so it was really hard to know how to act. Again, he did not at all like being urged to say anything regarding his wife's testamentary dispositions. So he rode along silent and unhappy. Chesterfield, partly divining the source of his dejection, but believing that it

principally arose from the doubt which had been mentioned of the fidelity of Mr Sigil, tried to banish reflection from his brother's mind, and made himself agreeable according to his notions. He told scandalous stories, tales of wonderful strokes of cleverness achieved by courtiers for their own private benefit; he repeated good things that had been said by Mr Sheridan and other wits, and gave some details of drinking bouts wherein sundry right honourable and learned personages had distinguished themselves. He gave, on his honour, certain facts belonging to the private history of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, and the exact sum which Mr Fox had lost at play during the last two months.

It was dusk when they got back to the Hall, and Sir Wolsey, feeling chilly, was looking forward to a little repose by the fire before dinner. Mr Curtis was in the entrance-hall when they came in, and when Sir Wolsey remarked to him that it was turning cold, extremely cold, he recommended the baronet to warm himself in his own room at once, and said that he would accompany him, and make there a report of his patient. Sir Wolsey retired as advised; and, when he had seated himself by the fire, Mr Curtis announced that he did not think Lady Salusbury quite so well that evening, and he had wished to inform Sir Wolsey himself.

"Good heavens! my lady worse!" exclaimed Sir Wolsey, rising again from his chair; "let me go to her, Curtis."

"Not at present, Sir Wolsey. Her ladyship was asleep ten minutes ago, and ought not to be disturbed. I will describe her condition to you if you please."

"You alarm me, Curtis," said Sir Wolsey with dignity, such as Marcus Brutus displayed when he received the tidings of Portia's death.

"I do not wish to alarm you, Sir Wolsey, and that is why I have come to speak to you here. But it is unfortunately true that Lady Salusbury's illness has assumed a new form, and not a more favourable one. I was on the way hither when a messenger met me to say that Lady Salusbury was in a fit, which I found to be the case."

"A fit, sir?"

"A fit, Sir Wolsey. It is past now, and my patient, who is somewhat exhausted, has been put to sleep by an anodyne. I cannot tell you the cause of the fit. Miss Clowance was reading to her ladyship when it came on. Neither can I tell you exactly what the accident imports, until she wakes and I see her again. There may not be cause for particular anxiety. On the other hand, it is possible that the consequences may be grave."

Sir Wolsey put a number of questions, not all of them very pertinent ones, or very easy to answer. He was greatly distressed. He felt as if the failing of his heart before Chesterfield's letter had been a foretaste of a better warranted sorrow. His happy days, he saw, might be suddenly brought to an end. His mind sought about for some other mind to lean on in his perplexity; but she on whom he had been accustomed to lean was stricken and on a sick-bed. His only ray of comfort was that Chesterfield's presence could not now be noticed, and that Chesterfield's knowledge of Sigil's movements would for the present be unimportant.

Mr Curtis said that he would call again in the evening, and that he had instructed Miss Clowance as to the steps to be taken whenever Lady Salusbury should wake.

It was while Chesterfield, after dinner, was pressing his brother to take more Madeira, and trying to encourage him, that a message came from Miss Clowance to say that Lady Salusbury was awake. The baronet went to her room, entered on tiptoe, and stood concealed by the curtain. The change in his wife gave him a great shock. Her countenance had altered greatly. One side of her face was slightly distorted. The eyes had a wandering look. When she spoke, her voice was faint and querulous; sadder still, the words were confused, and some of them hardly intelligible. Miss Clowance was ministering to the patient as she had been instructed by Mr Curtis.

It was some comfort that the sick woman was aware of her condition, and that she knew Miss Clowance. After a time she asked a question concerning her husband, and he thereupon appearing with proper caution, she spoke to him a few words. She was evidently weak, and not fit to be spoken with. Mr Curtis came according to promise. He thought her recognition of those around her, and her consciousness of her own state, favourable signs. The features and voice might recover speedily, and the weakness might pass, but it was impossible to speak with any confidence at present. The medical man stayed some time, and saw his patient made as comfortable for the night as possible. Eleanor Clowance arrived to take her share of the nursing. The lights, except a night-light, were extinguished, and poor Sir Wolsey had to retire to a couch, where for long he was sleepless.

Lady Salusbury had a quiet night. Mr Curtis pronounced this last attack to have been not so severe as he at first had thought possible. Tranquillity of mind and body must, he said, be preserved. Sir Wolsey, very restless and unhappy, could care for nothing. He had become painfully apprehensive

that his wife's life was in great danger. He left Chesterfield to himself a great deal, which Chesterfield did not object to, as he had much to think about. He, too, thought this might be a fatal sickness.

"Lady Salusbury's memory is quite sound," said Miss Clowance to Mr Curtis aside. "She remembers that this is Friday, and has asked whether Mr Sigil has arrived."

"It is a great matter that clearness of the memory," answered Mr Curtis; "but her ladyship must on no account be harassed with law business to-day. We must endeavour to postpone the interview with Mr Sigil for—well, for the present, let us say."

By the time this was said, Mr Sigil was very near to Traseaden Hall. Those were not days of telegraphs nor even of rapid posts, and nobody thought of attempting to prevent his visit from taking place. But Chesterfield Salusbury, always as thoughtful as circumstances would permit, kindly gave orders that his brother, in his distress, should not be intruded upon, but that Mr Sigil should be announced to him, Chesterfield. Accordingly, the lawyer was, about half an hour later, ushered into the library, and there received by Mr Salusbury with much courtesy. The state of matters in the house was explained to him, and he was given to understand that in all probability Lady Salusbury would not on that occasion avail herself of his services.

"In that case," answered Mr Sigil, "I will send to the village for post-horses, and return to Growcester."

"Not until you have had rest and refreshment," said Chesterfield. "You can surely give yourself a holiday for this afternoon, and stay the night; then set off comfortably to-morrow."

"You are very kind, sir; but time is of much consequence to me, and I cannot afford a day of repose, however kindly invited."

"Well, we must let Sir Wolsey know that you are here. I cannot, of course, give you instructions,—I can only say what I expect myself. I am very sorry to hear you say, Mr Sigil, that you are compelled to stick so close to your work. It were to be wished that, after a so long and honourable career, you were in a position to take the world a little more easily."

"I have very little complaint to make, sir; and I think I am hardly entitled to superannuation."

"Egad, certainly not, if we regard only your vigour. But I am afraid, my dear sir, that where we esteem much, we are apt to be inconsistent in our wishes of service. Thinking of your constant occupation and responsibilities, I incline to any argu-

ment that may tend to relieve you of them. Then, looking at your health and energy, I am pleased to think that you need not think of retirement for another half-century."

"What the deuce is all this?" thought Mr Sigil. And with the thought he remembered how Lady Salusbury had once or twice in his hearing let drop an expression which did not seem to ascribe to her brother-in-law great simplicity of character. A lawyer, when he catches an idea, has to put it to rapid use. He might as well be without it if he has to turn it over and examine every side of it, including the inside and the outside, before he can apply it to the matter in hand. "I will discover what my friend's game is," thought Mr Sigil, while he was making a proper acknowledgment for the interest in him shown by Chesterfield.

A few indifferent remarks were interchanged after this, Chesterfield being too well trained to show eagerness. But after a while he was struck suddenly with an identity of names, and apostrophised shortly, saying—

"By the way, is it a relation of yours who is a candidate for an appointment in the Excise? You will wonder how I come to know of the matter, but in truth Sir Harry Cringe, the head of that department, is a particular friend of mine, and we often talk over matters of business." The translation of which was, that Chesterfield had made some particular inquiries at Growceter, and ascertained a great deal about Mr Sigil's private affairs.

Mr Sigil said drily that the candidate was a relation of his. Chesterfield knew that it was his son, and expected that he would have said so. As he did not say so, there was a missing link, and Chesterfield had to keep grubbing on under cover when he would have debouched into the open. "Yes," continued he, "Sir Harry Cringe often talks to me very freely about his department. Very old friends, you know. Known each other I can't tell how many years."

"I have not the honour of being known to Sir Harry Cringe," remarked Mr Sigil.

"You might know a less pleasant person, I assure you. Immense number of applicants for these berths in the Excise just now. One would hardly expect such a run on a civil department when there is a war raging."

"No, indeed. The army and navy afford such fine openings that one would expect them to be the chief attractions."

"Your relative has good interest, I suppose," said Chesterfield carelessly.

"I fancy pretty good, sir."

"Egad, he should lay it on strong. Borough interest, perhaps. That's devilish good just now. You are an alderman yourself, Mr Sigil, are you not?"

"In the council, sir; not an alderman."

"Indeed, you astonish me. One would have thought the corporation would have been only too glad to number among its aldermen a citizen of your experience and influence." It had been told to Chesterfield, in answer to his inquiries, that Mr Sigil was very sore at not being elected an alderman, and that he had frequently complained of being passed over. Mr Sigil, on the other hand, perceived that Chesterfield had in some way been studying his private history. He only bowed in answer to Chesterfield's expression of honest indignation. It was up-hill work, but Mr Salusbury had patience and perseverance for service in a good cause. He went on—

"The Marquis of Tipwell is, I think, the patron of Growcester? Ah, I thought so. Now I can't imagine that the Marquis is aware of what is going on. He would never permit it. But citizens, if left to themselves, are often, from party feeling and other jealousies, blind to their best interests. I shall certainly talk to the Marquis on the subject, and I shall be much surprised if he does not induce them to mend their ways."

Instead of encouraging this conversation about the Marquis, Mr Sigil now inquired whether it might not be well to let Sir Wolsey Salusbury know of his arrival, as, in case of there being no present need of his services, he would depart as soon as possible.

"I will ascertain my brother's wishes immediately," Chesterfield said; "and I should like to mention to you, my dear sir, that, as Sir Wolsey Salusbury is very retiring and unselfish, I feel it my duty to look a little to his interests—to take note of matters which, except for his sake, could be no affairs of mine."

Mr Sigil waited until Chesterfield thought proper to proceed.

"It is within my knowledge that Lady Salusbury proposes to leave to my brother simply a life interest in certain property. How much better if she would leave him independent as regards the law, and tell him how she wishes things to be disposed of after him! That would be only treating him properly and with confidence."

"I cannot offer an opinion."

"But you may very probably be asked for an opinion, and I trust in that case you will appreciate my brother's backwardness to say anything for his own advantage, and put in a word for his being properly treated."

"It is not likely. But in case of my being called on to speak, I shall look solely to giving due and certain effect to the wishes which her ladyship may express."

"Of course you will, I am sure of it. But still it is desirable that, before forming her wishes, she should understand in what way it is proper to treat her husband. And as to giving effect to wishes, why, you and I know, Mr Sigil—all men of any experience know—that the mere wording of a will or other instrument may alter the whole effect of it, and completely baffle the intentions of those who dictate it, ha, ha!"

"That can happen only in case of the incapacity—or worse than incapacity—of the person who may draw it. Depend on it, that in any business on which I may be employed, my client's wishes will find ample and efficient expression."

"Unquestionably, my dear sir. You are a man of honour, as we well know. Indeed, I suspect that your unblemished probity has stood in the way of substantial emolument which might have come to you if you had been less strict. One always regrets that upright men should be denied the often very handsome douceurs which find their way to the pockets of those who are less scrupulous."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Miss Clowance, who had descended to say that Lady Salusbury was aware of Mr Sigil having arrived, and that she insisted on seeing him, notwithstanding that her medical adviser strongly disapproved of her doing so. Miss Clowance had come to explain to Mr Sigil Lady Salusbury's condition as well as she could, and to caution him that all business must be despatched as rapidly as was consistent with accuracy.

"I hope," said Chesterfield to Miss Clowance, "that we may construe your mission into a proof that Lady Salusbury is better."

"Not much better, I fear, as yet, sir," answered Dorothy, who did not know Mr Salusbury by sight even. "It is to be regretted that she is so urgent against the medical man's injunctions." Then turning to Mr Sigil: "Will you come, sir?" Mr Sigil left the room with her, and Chesterfield communed briefly with himself.

"Egad," thought he, "if she is so set upon business, she must think there is pressing reason for it, and one must keep one's senses awake. Cunning fellow that lawyer, but I think he understands me. A nod is as good as a wink, and so on. But now, how shall I ever rouse that hopeless ass Wolsey to take proper action at this important conjuncture? I am afraid he will fail me; but it is fortunate that I had my talk to the

lawyer. However, I must see what can be made of Wolsey, as he is." And he went off to Sir Wolsey's room.

CHAPTER X.

A VOID—THE WAY TO FILL IT.

Meanwhile there had been consternation in the sick-chamber, through the sick lady demanding again and again to be informed whether or not Mr Sigil had arrived. After it had been ascertained that he had come, she was told that he was there; and she thereupon desired that he should be brought without delay to her bedside. Miss Clowance opposed the desire as far as she could, and when she found her opposition unavailing, she ran to Sir Wolsey. He came to his wife, and soon yielded to the persistent entreaties of her who had been accustomed for so many years to guide all his actions. "Let Sigil come and speak to her, Dorothy," he said; "but tell him to make the interview as brief as he can." Having said this, the baronet, who had never interfered with the business of his wife's property, withdrew, that her confidential speech with the lawyer might be free and uninterrupted, which afforded the best chance of its being short.

Mr Sigil came; and with very little preface, Lady Salusbury (who appeared to have been thinking over and condensing the instructions) told him what she wished done, and desired him at once to make her will in conformity therewith, he having taken notes as she feebly spoke to him. When he had read the notes over to her, and was sure that he comprehended her intentions, he said he would withdraw and set his clerk (whom he had brought with him) to work on the formal document.

He retired, and the sick lady, left to her own thoughts, was calculating mentally how long time would be consumed in the preparation of the will, which was now her chief care. While she was thus musing, Sir Wolsey Salusbury once more entered the chamber and came to the bedside, no longer grand and imposing, as he was even when recently there present, but a great deal shaken and disconcerted—not only feeling distress, as he often enough did, but showing traces of it in his person, which commonly he did not. In truth, he had had a desperate pressure put on him by Chesterfield, and was come to do now

what no conception of his own breast would ever have induced him to attempt. Urgent persuasion had driven him to act contrarily to his own feelings and his ideas of propriety.

So much disordered was he, that his lady, ill as she was, could not but be struck with his condition. It affected her deeply, that one whose demeanour was generally so impassive should now exhibit so much feeling. As he took her hand in his, she hastened to say some words with the view of reassuring him as to her condition.

"My love," she said, "this has been an unfortunate attack, coming as it did when I was already ill; but it has seemed worse than it is. I am even now stronger, and my head is not affected at all."

"I hope, my dear, that you will soon be well again," he replied, kissing the hand which he held; "but tell me now, have I not been always a kind and affectionate husband to you?" He had come in to do the task to which he had been urged, and was fain to get it over without preamble.

"Indeed, indeed, my dear husband, you have always been most kind and loving."

"But you cannot trust me."

"Not trust you! I! Indeed I can."

"You cannot trust me to carry out your wishes with regard to your property. You confide all that to a lawyer."

"My dear, there are many particulars of my will which I should hardly like to mention to you, as they have reference to members of your family whom I cannot regard with any esteem. It is best as it is."

"No, dear, it is not best. Who is there of all my house whom I regard or ever regarded as I do you? You have been my best friend as well as my dear wife." His look was piteous as he said this, and the poor lady, weak and nervous, felt her heart smite her, and accused herself of being harsh to him.

"What would you have me do?" she asked.

"Charge me," he said, "with any dispositions which you wish made after my death, and let the world see that you have fully trusted me."

"And you will devise everything as I shall direct?"

"Assuredly. I give my sacred promise. But show entire faith in me."

This colloquy, which was rather longer than it has been here written, resulted in Mr Sigil being summoned again in haste. He was informed that the memoranda which he had made were to be written out fair to be delivered to Sir Wolsey, but that the will would be a much simpler one than she had at first in-

tended; indeed, that the property, except a few legacies of moderate amount, would be bequeathed to Sir Wolsey. Mr Sigil only assured himself that this was now truly the purpose of the testatrix, and not the vacillation of disease, and proceeded to carry out his instructions.

That evening Lady Salusbury solemnly handed to her husband, in a sealed packet, the memoranda which Mr Sigil had drawn up, saying, "Now you see, my dear husband, how thoroughly I trust you. By your love for me, I charge you to lose no time, after you are in possession of the property, in making a will in accordance with my written wishes." He promised solemnly, and she was content.

A little later and she signed her will, being raised on pillows for that purpose, and Mr Curtis and the clergyman of the parish witnessed her signature. Her ladyship then became composed, and finally sleepy. "I would not have allowed this business interview," said Mr Curtis; "but now that it has taken place, I hope that my patient will be benefited by having the care off her mind. She is better already."

If her ladyship felt relieved after the events of this day, so did Mr Chesterfield Salusbury. The latter knew that he had gained several points, and was greatly delighted with his own management. He did not know the exact amount of his success, because the sealed packet was not to be opened until after Lady Salusbury's death, and, moreover, because Sir Wolsey instinctively concealed it from him, but he was sure that he had gained enough to be thankful for. He was of opinion that unless he had had two strings to his bow he could not have come off so well. Wolsey assuredly would not have had the wit to move her ladyship's resolution without the lawyer, and the lawyer might have failed to find a convenient occasion of intervening had not Sir Wolsey been goaded to make the appeal to his wife. "I approached that fellow Sigil just in the right way," was his thought. "If I had said less, he would hardly have understood me; if I had said more, he might have thought it necessary to exhibit virtuous indignation at such plain speaking. *Le juste milieu, le juste milieu, ha, ha!*" and Chesterfield hummed an air, and took snuff complacently. Such is the delight of an approving conscience!

The next day early Mr Sigil left Traseaden Hall; later Mr Chesterfield Salusbury took his departure, feeling that he could give no further comfort to his sorrowing brother; and Sir Wolsey was again, for the most part, left to himself. He was, however, hopeful now that his wife seemed to be rallying once more, and was making a step or two towards getting back to

his old routine, when grief, which had been, as it were, sporting with him before, struck him at length a downright blow.

It was Miss Eleanor Clowance who had slept in Lady Salusbury's chamber. The patient had gone to sleep calmly after taking her potion in the night. Eleanor, too, had slept soundly after this until at daylight she awoke. Going to the bed gently, she was alarmed at her friend's appearance. She spoke, and got no answer. She touched the hand; it was rigid. A dreadful terror came over her. She rang the bell.

Her sister, the attendants, Sir Wolsey, Mr Curtis, were soon in the room, but only to realise a sad truth. It was the chamber of death.

Mr Curtis said that there had been a second fit. He thought it probable that there had been no suffering.

No one's death ever made a greater void in a neighbourhood. No one was ever more sincerely or more generally regretted.

Sir Wolsey Salusbury suffered severely in mind; everybody knew that he suffered; but they said that he bore his affliction in a grand and manly manner. He had lost his companion and guide, and felt desolate; more than that, there was none now to look to his little comforts and fancies, and he felt the misery of that want without very clearly understanding what the want was. People came to him for orders, and he had all manner of arrangements to make, which troubled him much in the forethought required, and generally proved very bad management in the results. The poor old fellow fancied that the world was in a conspiracy to worry him in his trouble.


But the will was highly complimentary to him, and ought to have been some satisfaction. He succeeded to Traseaden Hall, and nearly all of his wife's wealth, almost without a condition, unless it could be called a proviso that Lady Salusbury expressed her confidence that he would dispose of the property according to her wishes, which he well knew. He had been so baited by Chesterfield, that he foresaw further persecution if he told him of the packet; and so he kept that document quiet. He, however, opened the packet, and perused its contents. Not one penny of the property was, he quite understood, to find its way to his own family after him. He had promised to make a will endowing certain persons, chiefly the Clowance family, and he determined to set about doing so as soon as ever the little frets of business, from which he was daily suffering, should subside.

Chesterfield, for his part, was entirely satisfied with the will, which more than answered his expectations. He felt convinced that he had duly estimated Mr Sigil's character, and that that

subtile man of business was the chief agent in the production of so favourable a result. It would be extremely impolitic to let such services go unrewarded, and still more impolitic to *appear* to give rewards to so profound a dissembler; the matter must be managed delicately; and so Chesterfield exerted himself to get Sigil's son into the Excise, and succeeded in doing it. He, moreover, persuaded his friend Mr Sheridan to talk so seriously to the Marquis of Tipwell one day, over their third bottle, of the injustice of not making Mr Sigil an alderman, that the Marquis, whose moral perception became very acute about two hours after dinner, saw the propriety of what Mr Sheridan urged, and gave orders to his agent in Growcester accordingly. He was quite sure that the whole thing would be comprehended without explanation. Thus was Mr Sigil's great grievance removed, and one of his sons provided for, because a man of influence believed him to have acted like a rogue. Well, let the matter be looked at in a proper light, and it will be seen that Sigil, who was a thoroughly honest man, got only what he deserved; it was Mr Chesterfield Salusbury who thought he was rewarding vice, when in truth he was encouraging probity. It would be well if cross purposes always led to such results; there was poetical, if not intentional, justice in the thing.

Chesterfield, it has been said, was well satisfied with the will. He remarked the expression in it which denoted that Sir Wolsey was possessed of her ladyship's intentions, and would carry them out; but that idea caused him, at first sight, but little anxiety. He wrote very kindly to his brother, requesting him to come and stay at Ruddilands for as long as he might find it agreeable to do so. But Sir Wolsey, though he was miserable enough at home, thought he might be miserable there in his own way, which would not be the case at Ruddilands. He was anxious, too, to get his will made in accordance with his promise. He studied the memoranda a great deal, and thought how he should give them effect; but as there was nobody to give him the spur, he took no active step.

As Chesterfield became more familiar with his gift-horse, and began to look it in the mouth, he pondered the expression in the will, and was at no loss to connect it with his sister-in-law's threat of former days, that neither he nor his should ever benefit in the slightest degree by her property. "She has told the blockhead something or other," thought he, "and there may be interested people pressing him to make a will at once. By [George will do], I had better look to this. I'll run over and see what the donkey is about. What does he want of a will at all? I'm his presumptive heir, damn him!" So he "ran over."



When Sir Wolsey saw his brother, he could not help expecting something unpleasant to happen. But he was agreeably disappointed. Chesterfield was disagreeable chiefly when he urged him to action of some kind; at present he came to prevent him from acting. Not that Chesterfield started the subject of a will, and bade Sir Wolsey not to make one—no, no; it was not certain that such thing was meditated, and he was not going to suggest it. But he talked to his brother a good deal about the estate, and, very delicately and guardedly, about the possibility of his some day marrying again and having heirs, and he so rounded his talk as to show that a wholesale exclusion of Salusburys from the succession might amount to the disinheriting of Sir Wolsey's own children. The baronet's incautious answers to observations such as these gave Chesterfield some, though not a very clear, insight into his intentions; and Chesterfield preached away, suggesting dreadful complications if the greatest circumspection were not observed. He knew very well that any excuse for putting off business would be welcome to Sir Wolsey; he suggested plenty of excuses, and then left and went home again. Sir Wolsey took out his paper of instructions after Chesterfield had gone, and read it over for the (say) fiftieth time. "My dear, dear wife," said he to himself, "can never have thought of such a case as my having heirs of my own; clearly not. I do not for a moment suppose that she meant any one to take precedence of my own offspring; impossible." And then he would think that if so important a contingency had been overlooked, a good many other important things might have been overlooked, and he must not regard the memoranda as well-considered provisions, but rather as rough suggestions which he must shape as circumstances might require, preserving, of course, their spirit, but not blindly following their letter. He entirely overlooked, or perhaps he had never known, the fact that a man may make more than one will, and need not be deterred from executing one in the present because it is possible that one of a different tenor may be necessary at a future day. He looked upon his will as an irreversible decree, and took heed accordingly how he made it.

It is remarkable how a man will let the time slip by while he studies how to do correctly that which he had rather not do at all. Lady Salusbury had been dead nine or ten months, and her widower had made no will, but, with fidgeting about his will and about other things innumerable, had drifted into a most unhappy state of being. Ideas did not frequently strike the poor man; but the very dullest flint and steel, if constantly clashed together, will some time or other produce a spark, and

so it may be supposed that a brain not over-forgetive (to borrow Falstaff's expression) may after nine or ten months of reflecting on a matter conceive a new idea concerning it. Whether this reasoning be right or wrong, certain it is that an idea did come to Sir Wolsey, who could not tell whether he was happier in the pride of having originated it, or in the relief from perplexity which it seemed to promise him. His loneliness and misery constantly reminded him of Chesterfield's sayings about marrying again. Chesterfield, of course, never meant him seriously to think of anything of the kind, but only to postpone indefinitely the making of a will; yet this was the result. Sir Wolsey thought a good deal about having somebody to take care of him. He thought a good deal, too, about the way in which his marriage would affect the dispositions which he had solemnly promised to make.

After a vast deal of cogitation, two questions were rather clearly presented to his mind. The first: "Could his wife possibly have intended that he should make a will to disinherit his own children, supposing that he were to have any?" The second: "If it were determined that he could honourably make his child his heir, in what direction should he look for a wife who would in any degree supply the place of the wife he had lost?" Now, the consideration of each of these questions brought the Misses Clowance to his mind. They were the persons who would be set aside from the inheritance, supposing that he were to have a child to whom he were to leave the property; and they were the persons who knew most of the late Lady Salusbury's modes of management, and of the baronet's tastes and ways; also, they were women on whose principles entire reliance might be placed, whose family was good, and either of whom would with credit fulfil the duties required of the mistress of Traseaden Hall. At last he took in at one view the factors of both these problems, and perceived, to his delight, that if he were to marry one of the Misses Clowance, and the property were to descend to his and her child, there would be but a small departure from the letter of the memoranda, and no departure from their spirit. This is the happy idea of which mention was made a little above; it suggested a compromise of the most ingenious and satisfactory description; it took a huge weight off Sir Wolsey's mind.

Now, from the little hints that have been given about Sir Wolsey Salusbury's character, it might be not unreasonable to infer that, as he had taken nearly a twelvemonth to arrive at this idea, it would take a twelvemonth more to bring him into a condition of mind to carry it into effect. That would be con-

sistent, one may say. And at first view it certainly looks so. But if it be remembered that the baronet has hitherto been seen always moved by the will of another, when at the same time his own will was only towards inaction and indolence, and that now he was moved to action by his own will, the consistency vanishes. At any rate, be the foregoing distinction correct or be it false, it is a fact that Sir Wolsey Salusbury proceeded to act briskly upon his thought; also, that he was guided by an instinct of cunning to proceed with secrecy, knowing well that his brother, if he should discover it, would disapprove and thwart his plan.

CHAPTER XL

TURKEYS AS GAGES D'AMOUR

In choosing a partner for life, a man, notoriously, is not always guided by considerations which he can define or explain. Hymen is *le grand monarque* in this matter, and *le roi le veut* is all the explanation we have a right to ask for, or are likely to get. Certes, Sir Wolsey Salusbury could have rendered very little reason for the design that was in him; a design had come out of the tangles of his brain, and that was a great deal; as to how it came, that was a question much too subjective for him. There were, however, some who knew him well who professed to see exactly how he was guided in making his choice between Dorothy and Eleanor. Dorothy, they said, was an eminently practical woman, while Eleanor had just a *soupçon* of the romantic temperament. Dorothy was Eleanor's senior by two years. Now Sir Wolsey wanted decision, sound sense, and firmness in his helpmate, and could dispense with sentiment. Again, Sir Wolsey saw the fitness of reducing to a minimum the disparity in years betwixt himself and his intended bride. *Ergo*, Dorothy Clowance was the lady to be distinguished by his proposal. *Ergo*, or *non ergo*, he set about paying his addresses to Dorothy.

The labour we delight in, if it can physic pain, can also smarten up a particularly dull disposition into a comparative briskness. Sir Wolsey Salusbury, always dressed with precision, one day made precision more precise, ordered out the liveliest of his horses, and rode out to the little town of Veorse, with his groom behind him, and paid a visit to the Misses

Clowance. And a very proper act too, said everybody. He had given himself up to his grief long enough; it was high time that he should make some sign of animation; and nothing could be in better taste than beginning his return to society by calling on the ladies who had been, at the time of her death, his wife's nearest living relations. Dorothy and Eleanor were much pleased to receive him; and he, putting on his most gracious manner, made a modicum of conversation go a long way. The visit was rather tedious. The baronet made the same remark twice or thrice, and had to be helped on by the ladies. Among other topics which they had pressed into the service of making conversation run, was some notice of their youngest sister Una, who was at school at Bath. Lady Tattel, who was known to Sir Wolsey, and was then at the Bath, had very kindly invited Una to spend the day with her, and go to the theatre in the evening. Sir Wolsey asked whether Lady Tattel gave Una a good dinner, and Miss Clowance replied that it could not have been nicer, as Una had roast turkey.

"You like roast turkey, Dorothy?" said the baronet to Miss Clowance, as solemnly as if he had been questioning her on a point of faith.

"I think it very nice indeed," replied Dorothy.

"I am truly glad," said Sir Wolsey, "to know of anything that you particularly like."

"You are quizzing me, Sir Wolsey, for saying I like roast turkey."

"By no means. I feel much interested in your tastes."

He took a magnificent leave, asking permission to call again.

"Well, I don't know," said Miss Eleanor Clowance after his departure. "Sir Wolsey isn't a young man certainly, but he's a finer man than many of the young. So straight and dignified!"

"Sir Wolsey is a fine man, beyond doubt. I thought I perceived a slight stoop when his grief was only three months old; but men like him don't give way easily, and he's as stately as ever."

The next day two fine turkeys were left at the ladies' door, with a note from Sir Wolsey to Miss Clowance, asking her acceptance of the birds, and announcing that the donor hoped to have the honour of paying the ladies another visit in a few days.

"Very kind of Sir Wolsey!" said Dorothy.

"Very kind indeed!" returned Eleanor. "But what shall we do with two large turkeys, Dorothy? It will puzzle our small household to dispose of one. As for the other——"

"We will send it to the vicarage. Percival will be glad of it, I daresay."

And so that affair passed. And then the baronet called again, and the ladies thanked him very much, and he said he was delighted that his gift had proved acceptable. And he went away, and the next day sent two more splendid turkeys.

"How odd, to be sure!" said Eleanor. "Shall we send one to Percival again?"

"I think not," answered Miss Clowance. "Mr Brownlow is going to Rutland to-morrow. He will have plenty of room in his chaise, and we might ask him to take one to our sister Adair. She may be glad of it just now. She is very delicate, and she will like it."

"Oh, dear Fanny, yes, yes, to be sure. Don't you wish it may be a boy, Dorothy? She longs so for a boy!"

"My dear, we shall not have the ordering of that. I shall rejoice to hear that Fanny is well and strong again with either a boy or a girl."

Before the turkeys were eaten, the Reverend Percival Clowance and his wife, and his sisters Dorothy and Eleanor, received an invitation to stay at Traseaden Hall, which they all accepted. None of them had ever seen the baronet so lively as he was during this visit. They made excursions, and had many other amusements, and it was remarked that Sir Wolsey, in proposing a mode of passing the time, referred always in the first instance to Miss Clowance. But this was remarked only among friends, who would be sure to keep the observation to themselves. It is true that one or two of the irrepressible gossips of Veorse did think they sniffed something, and that they faintly gave tongue (for who or what can altogether escape the vigilance of such?); but Mrs Clack, the arbitress of all the gossip, and supreme judge of occurrences in Veorse, pronounced that the whole proceeding was a just tribute to the memory of Lady Salusbury, whose relations were the first persons invited to the reopening of the mansion, and that it had no gossiping significance whatever. So the yelpers were silenced for the time. But when there was another gathering at Traseaden, and when Sir Wolsey Salusbury was seen two or three times a week riding towards the Miss Clowances' door, and when presents were coming in daily from the Hall, then the yelpers could claim that they had started game, and require to have justice done them, and then Mrs Clack herself had to strop her tongue and put a finer edge on it, that she might maintain her precedence in matters of this kind.

"It is quite touching," said Eleanor, one day after the

departure of Sir Wolsey, "to witness the devotion shown by Sir Wolsey to our dear kind friend and relative. He could not take a plainer or a more delicate way of showing his unceasing regret. As we are to have the property eventually, with how good a grace does he proclaim to all the world his entire acquiescence in his dear wife's arrangements!"

"You are talking too fast, Eleanor," Dorothy said.

"No, dear; surely you don't mean that. You must appreciate Sir Wolsey's liberal and charming behaviour as much as any one."

"Perhaps better than some. Now, listen to me, my dear Eleanor. It would be a great deal better if in this house many remarks were not made about Sir Wolsey's magnanimity, his undying regrets, and so on. Future events may prove the prudence of being reticent now."

Eleanor looked at her sister, puzzled and a little frightened.

"I mean, my dear, that it may be questioned whether Sir Wolsey intends to mourn for ever, and whether his attentions to us mean exactly what you imagine. To be very plain with you, Sir Wolsey has said things to me more than once which can be explained only on the supposition that he intends to ask me to marry him."

"Oh, Dorothy!"

A sudden announcement that an affair very inferior to this was pending in the next street would have moved Eleanor powerfully. What, then, must have been her agitation at being told that it would be immediately in her own house? She wept. She embraced Dorothy. She sat down composedly and resignedly, and said such things were past our comprehension. Then she abandoned her composure and resignation, wept copiously again, embraced again. These alternations in the exhibition of emotion are curious. They are not confined to the human race. When a dog recovers his lost master, he circles round him at speed, barking at the top of his voice, till, finding that he can but imperfectly express his feelings in that way, he lies down at the feet which he is so glad to see again, giving himself up to inaction, as who should say, "It is enough; I have nothing to do more in the busy world." Then in another second he is off again in full career, and making more noise than ever.

Seriously, it was not at all to be wondered at that Sir Wolsey's unlooked-for proceeding caused great excitement in the house of Clowance. The match would make an immense difference to them. But it must be said, in justice to them, that while they could not but feel somewhat exalted among themselves, they

were extremely quiet and modest in their demeanour outside their house. Sir Wolsey followed up his attentions by a proposal in due form, and was accepted. His engagement was announced in Veorse. The Clowances received congratulations with a becoming meekness, not disowning that they were very fortunate, but at the same time unwilling to bore their friends with their own coming greatness.

Sir Wolsey had managed admirably. By showing an energy and a despatch for which no man would ever have given him credit, he had got the start of any who might have offered impediments, and had all but won his game. But it was not for nothing that Mrs Clack had whetted her tongue. It would have surprised Mrs Clack to tell her that she was one of those privileged to blow the trump of fame, for she was a modest woman without an adequate understanding of her own powers. She knew that she could raise and lead a chorus sufficient to entertain society in Veorse; but she did not know that a blast from her mouth could resound over hill and dale, and be carried along until it entered the ear of Mr Chesterfield Salusbury.

"Wolsey going to be married!" exclaimed Chesterfield, when his ear was entered as aforesaid; "d—d nonsense! I know what trouble it took to marry him when two of us were working hard in the cause,—indeed, I may say three of us, for the widow of happy memory was as ardent as any. That's the last danger to be apprehended from him. But I should have remembered that there are two parties to an arrangement of that kind; and though he may be supine enough, some designing woman may have thought it worth while to lay siege to him. Shocking to think of the lengths to which selfishness can lead people, women as well as men! Yes, I must go and look after this poor idiot, and prevent him from falling into a trap, if I can."

CHAPTER XII.

NEW REGIME AT TRASEADEN.

Not like the sweet south, but like a blight, Chesterfield descended upon as happy a little party as ever made holiday. Two or three neighbours and the bride-elect and her relations were passing a time of great contentment at Traseaden Hall. The host showed quite invention in making his guests happy;

an unwonted activity appeared in his care for their due entertainment; but ever and anon, between the acts, as it were, of this sunny drama, he would draw away his betrothed, and delight himself with leading her about the house and grounds, and in hearing her say how she would order things (for it was his wish and request, and no usurpation, that she should order everything) when she should come there as mistress and ruler. As King Richard thought that he had mistaken (he said mistook) his person for a long while, when he found how he could make himself agreeable to a lady, so thought Sir Wolsey Salusbury that he had mistaken, or mistook, the powers of his own mind, now that he found how deftly he could pull the strings and draw the stops that give motion and tone to society. He got rather into a state of exaltation at the discovery of this new power, and instead of letting his mind continue in the condition which we may suppose to be that of an oyster's or a sponge's mind, he actually began to dream of initiating certain methods of killing time, and of distinguishing himself, a thing which he had never before thought worth the moving of his finger.

It was just a question whether he was going to quit the chrysalis state, and commence a gossamer fluttering. He felt his shell getting loose, he got glimpses of the light outside,—a purple light, a sensation of unfolding wings had come to him; when the breath of the ice-king, bearing a frost, a killing frost, put a sudden period to his evolution. Not that Chesterfield swaggered in like a frost-king, or an ogre, or a magician, and suddenly threw a pall over the happy scene. He did nothing of the kind. He joined in the little pastimes, and as they were susceptible, as one may suppose, of more spirit, he enlivened them. Nevertheless, Sir Wolsey, when he saw his brother, felt like a culprit,—his heart sank within him; he may have maintained the form of gaiety, but he denied the power thereof.

To the two sisters, after he had ascertained exactly how matters were, Chesterfield's address was honeyed, and his attentions were marked. Eleanor felt agreeably disappointed in him, and wondered how her departed friend could have been prejudiced against so affable and undesigning a person. But Dorothy would have been cautious in taking the evidence of even her own senses in opposition to Lady Salusbury's conviction. She turned a deaf ear to blandishment, and looked for the cloven foot.

Very little passed on the subject of the marriage between the brothers for a day or two until the little party broke up. Then Wolsey, with much perturbation, made his exposition of the state of the case, and Chesterfield listened as if he appreciated

a good joke. "Soon began to amuse yourself, eh, Wolsey? Well, well, there is no use in sighing eternally; that I grant. Haven't forgotten your old military habits, eh, my boy?" Wolsey didn't know what there was peculiarly military about his proceedings, and was only too well pleased to find Chesterfield inclined to good humour. But the fact was that Mr Salisbury had made up his mind to treat the whole thing as a joke, and to refuse to believe for a moment that his brother could possibly be serious. A man of any decision would have stopped such a game with three words before it had been ten minutes begun; but he knew Wolsey would not do this.

A difference in Sir Wolsey's behaviour to Miss Clowance was very soon observable. Mrs Clack, not to be forestalled this time, drew attention to his remissness. He was unwell. He went from home for a short visit to his brother, and the visit stretched till it became a long one. Miss Clowance expressed surprise at his behaviour, and he excused himself two or three times. At last she received a letter penned by her false lover, but evidently dictated by his brother, the purport of which was that Sir Wolsey found that he had entered unwarily into an engagement which was suitable neither to his years nor to the present circumstances of his family; that he regretted and deplored that he had been led by his admiration to behave so indiscreetly; that he craved Miss Clowance's forgiveness, and entreated her consent to a cancelling of the promises on both sides. Dorothy, if she had thought it worth her while, might possibly have opposed Chesterfield's wiles with success; but she took altogether a different line, treated Sir Wolsey, after he showed himself recreant, with much disdain, and gave him back his promise very distinctly. It was a cruel blow to her and to all her relatives, but they bore it with spirit. They had shown no undue elation when the sudden expectation of good fortune came upon them, and they behaved with great propriety and discretion now in this reverse. Everybody sympathised with them; everybody cried shame on Sir Wolsey Salisbury.

How Chesterfield went to work to bend his brother to his will is not exactly known, but he carried his point entirely, and did not mind what was said. As to Sir Wolsey, he was quite conscious that he was doing wrong, but he had not strength of mind to resist. He was very miserable and very much ashamed; his only solace now was the recollection that his will would make compensation to Dorothy and all her kin, and he determined that the compensation should be ample.

While he was one day feeling very forlorn, and leaning his

head on his hand, Chesterfield came to him and said, "Why so low, Wolsey? I wish we knew how to rouse you. You don't get on well here, somehow; though I am sure everybody does what is possible to cheer you."

Sir Wolsey replied with much dignity that he had nothing to complain of; that he was as happy as he ever expected to be; and that he thought he would go to Winkle Bay; his mother had always thought that a wonderfully salutary place.

"Winkle Bay!" echoed Chesterfield. "What, to be shut up by yourself! No, that will never do. You will become ten times worse. Now, look here, my boy; I've been thinking very anxiously of your case, for it makes me unhappy; it does, by [suppressed]. A plan has occurred to me which I think likely to have the happiest results. It will cost me some inconvenience and some pain; but never mind that, if it will do you good."

"You are very kind, Chesterfield," said Sir Wolsey.

"I mean to be," answered Chesterfield; "but whether you may be able to see the great advantage of my scheme to yourself is a question. Disordered minds are apt to object to the remedies that suit them best."

The baronet waited grandly.

"What I thought was this," continued Chesterfield; "you would be better in your own house than anywhere else, and indeed you ought, for many reasons, to be there. But sad memories and associations would be aroused there; and we don't think (I say *we*, for we have all been talking of you),—we don't think that, if left to yourself, you will ever take effectual steps for dispelling your gloom. We all agree about that. Now, one of us has suggested one thing, and one another; but after a hard fight—for they don't like the idea at all—after a hard fight, I have persuaded them to consent to go and stay with you there until you are in better condition, or you can again make a cheerful home for yourself by taking a wife—a *suitable* wife that means, of course."

"I shall be glad to see you."

"Well, you mustn't look upon us simply as visitors, you know. If we go at all, it will be for your good, and no good will be done unless you feel at your ease, and everybody feels at ease, and the formalities of a mere visit are dispensed with. My wife is a first-rate housekeeper and manager, and would save you every kind of trouble at home. I never was a very useful fellow, but I could make the house a little cheerful with some well-chosen society, and my son when with you would see to the stables and grounds, as he has considerable aptitude for

those duties. Now, what say you, Wolsey? Shall we try it? All difficulties have been got over so far as my people are concerned, and glad I am that it is so, as I am most anxious to see you in better spirits."

Sir Wolsey said that they would try it, and it was tried, and the trial lasted to the term of his natural life. Chesterfield Salusbury and all that belonged to him arose and gat them out of Ruddilands, and went down to Traseaden Hall, and dwelt there.

When in old days a patriarch shifted his dwelling-place, the occasion was thought suitable for enumerating the members of his household; and as Chesterfield's household, because they had little to do with the narrative, have not as yet been all particularly mentioned, it may be as well to take this opportunity of introducing them, as they will be connected with the part of the story which is yet to come.

Chesterfield and his invalid wife, both stricken in years, went to Traseaden. Their only son Dunstan went also with them; but the wife of Dunstan, and mother of his children, went not, forasmuch as this lady had summarily disconnected herself from the house of Salusbury. But Chesterfield's two grandsons, Dunstan's sons, Chatham and Wolsey, both lads, took part in the great migration. Thus did Chesterfield, his wife, and their son and their little ones, enter upon what Chesterfield intended to be their inheritance. No mention need be made of his flocks and herds, or of his stuff, seeing that he left behind him every saleable property, and after a sufficient time had elapsed to save the appearance of a premeditated invasion of his brother's house, sold it advantageously.

Of Chesterfield himself, as he has already been once or twice before the reader, it will not be necessary to speak at length here, further than to say that the mode of life which he followed had agreed with him better than it did with his friend Mr Sheridan. The fire of his eye was not quenched, neither was his natural force much abated.

Mrs Chesterfield Salusbury was a poor invalid old woman, who had not now, and never had, very much to recommend her. She was greatly despised and disliked by her husband, and not much respected by her son and grandsons. But as to material comfort, she was pretty well off, as, although Chesterfield seldom had any ready money and was much in debt, profusion generally reigned in his house, and the cost of the profusion was contributed, directly and indirectly, by a great number of persons. She had become accustomed to her moral grievances, which were now of long standing and familiar; and not being

a very sensitive person, she continued to bear her cross. Some intimate friends were of opinion that Chesterfield's rage against her had subsided into a contempt and indifference not much in excess of the mode, after he became too old to think of mending his fortunes by a second marriage.

Of Chesterfield's son Dunstan, only the birth has been mentioned. It is necessary now to be a little more communicative, and the necessity is an unpleasant one, inasmuch as Dunstan in no way added to, or even maintained, the lustre of his house. It will be remembered how Chesterfield and his lamented father were both distinguished by a strong regard for themselves and for their family, and that this regard was tempered by an acumen which enabled them to live, and bring up children, and to amuse themselves at other people's expense, without putting themselves into a state of antagonism with the law (which they greatly respected and eulogised), or incurring the censure of society (of which they were favourites and ornaments). His father's high qualities had descended entire to Chesterfield. But to Chesterfield's son Dunstan had been transmitted (and this fact is commended to the attention of those who are anxious for the splitting up of properties in descent) only the strong regard for self, without any of the acumen which alone could guide that regard to prosperous results. In manner Dunstan resembled his father; but as to combination, or forethought, or perspicacity, or prudence, or patience, there was a sad falling off. Dunstan knew how to get into debt as well as his father, but he did not know how to subsist honourably amid his obligations. He left his public school through having entered most unscientifically into the possession of some property of a neighbour; and he left college prematurely in consequence of clumsy experiments with the dice. Chesterfield was hugely mortified and enraged on both occasions, but he was moved by the generous ire of an ancient Spartan, and reproached his son with the detection, not the mistaken policy.

Placed in a public office (as he easily was through his sire's influence), Dunstan became heavily involved, and enjoyed not a very good name among his peers. A polite, good-natured fellow enough, but a fellow in dealing with whom one had to take great care. When Dunstan's ill-advised and uncouth proceedings made it necessary that he should resign his appointment in His Majesty's service, it was discovered that he had been married for three or four years, that he had two young sons, that his wife was a person of uncertain origin, but some good looks, whom he had been enticed into marrying, and that she

had, some months ago, separated rather suddenly from her lord, and gone abroad. When Chesterfield was informed of this last drop in the cup of affliction, he mocked at it. "No, no," said Chesterfield; "he's not quite such an ass as that. I'll answer for it there's no marriage," and he set to work to assure himself of the fact. But, unhappily, there was a marriage. Mrs Dunstan was not an ass, if her husband was. He would be a baronet some day, she knew. So she made all fast.

As there was much obscurity about Dunstan's marriage, so there was a mystery about the cause and manner of his wife's desertion of him. Even at the time of her disappearance, those who knew or cared anything about his domestic affairs declared that the lady had not departed in what they were pleased to call "the usual way,"—that is to say, she had not decamped with a lover.

She was known to have acquaintance with many European languages, and it was believed that she, soon after her flight, was turning her knowledge to account by rendering service to different foreign governments, which were then beginning to be affected by the troubles which spread from France. Indeed, she was seen and recognised at different foreign capitals by persons who said that she was believed to be leading a life without reproach, and living by her wits. Political employment seemed to suit her well, for she was handsome, persuasive, clever, and not disinclined to political intrigue.

Of course those who asserted their belief in her respectability were assailed by the question, "Why, then, did she leave her husband, and undertake to keep herself by her exertions, if there were no admirer in the case?" The answer to this was only breathed in whispers, but from circumstances which afterwards came to light, it was believed by the family to be the correct one. It was to the effect that she, being a very sharp person, and one difficult to keep uninformed of any subject to which she might apply her mind, had become better acquainted with Dunstan's dishonesty than any other person save himself at that time was. She foresaw, as it would seem, certain exposure and ruin; and once that she became convinced of what the future held in store for them, she took her resolution (as she was quite capable of doing), and left him to bear his disgrace alone.

Dunstan, being a fool, and moderately vicious, had of course a certain kind of luck. While Chesterfield was considering whether he should not be a broken-hearted and indignant parent, and cast off his degenerate son for ever, a bachelor brother of Mrs Salusbury died, and left his nephew Dunstan

some five hundred pounds a-year, whereupon the paternal affection of his father Chesterfield revived. "It is Corban," said Dunstan, and Chesterfield received him and his children into Ruddilands, five hundred pounds a-year in cash being to him a convenient acquisition.

The sons were named respectively Chatham and Wolsey, Dunstan having had the family taste in nomenclature. Now that they were removing to Traseaden, Chesterfield had no further solicitude about their education. His brother would provide for that.

It is almost unnecessary to say, that from the time when Chesterfield and his belongings came to Traseaden, Sir Wolsey was little better than a tolerated guest in his own house. He paid for everything, of course; although Chesterfield assured many creditors, who became importunate when he changed his residence, that he was living now at much more expense than before, as his brother insisted upon his bearing not only the greater part of the household expenses, but the cost of the stables and hounds.

It was not Chesterfield's way to do things with damaging haste. He waited a little while, after he had established himself at Traseaden, before he said a word about the descent of the property; but when the fulness of time was come, he discovered all about the memoranda left by Lady Salusbury. After some patience, he got possession of the document; and, as it never was again heard of, and it is not now among the papers which are preserved at Traseaden, there is ground for believing that he destroyed it.

One move more, and Chesterfield's mission would be accomplished. He was Wolsey's heir-at-law, and would therefore inherit the property if his brother should die intestate; but he could not feel assured that he would die intestate. Lady Salusbury unquestionably intended that her widower should make another will after her death; but was it not possible that he had made a will in her lifetime, or otherwise tied himself to let the property descend in some way which, if not exactly in accordance with her ladyship's last dispositions, was at any rate not in accordance with Chesterfield's desires? Wolsey said distinctly that he had never made a will, but he admitted that he frequently signed papers at his wife's request, and that his signatures had been witnessed by persons called in for that purpose. Chesterfield, judging others by himself, thought it very possible that the weak baronet might have been induced unwittingly to sign away the property. Nothing could put this right so decidedly as another will of much later date. Mr

Salisbury did not press for this at once, but he never lost sight of it. Sir Wolsey in a year or two became very much broken, both in mind and body. He was seldom seen outside his own grounds, and he wanted to be very little seen within them. Bit by bit he gave up even the attempt to have a will of his own, and when Chesterfield saw that his opportunity had arrived, he made his brother dispose of the estate as he (Chesterfield) wished.

To make the will look as if it had received the attentive consideration of the testator, it was made to contain a number of small provisions, and there were even legacies to Dorothy and Eleanor Clowanca. The bulk of the property was bequeathed to Chesterfield and his heirs, but failing them, to their sister, Mrs Leicester and her heirs. All looked extremely reasonable and regular, and Chesterfield thought that his work in this world was pretty well accomplished.

He had not done as well as was possible, nevertheless he might have done much worse. Reflection on it was altogether not unpleasant; and Chesterfield firmly believed that the result was due to his own general morality and uprightness. It was his wont to judge himself by his neighbours, compared with whom he considered himself a person of more than ordinary virtue. "Look," he would say, "at that old rascal Sir Bullion Huncka. He poisoned his wife, if ever a man committed a crime since the world was made. I'm certain he did. Yet, look how the old villain has thriven! That affair, too, of Chow-sell! Unquestionable forgery, though it could not be proved against him. Now, when two such patent rascals as Huncks and Chow-sell have their hundreds of thousands, I don't see why I should be grudged my modest acquisition. I never poisoned anybody, and I never committed a forgery."

It is not certain whether Chesterfield reckoned it a misfortune or an advantage that his son Dunstan was killed in a quarrel arising out of some betting transaction not long after the will of Sir Wolsey was made. The succession would go on to his grand-children. It was never perceived that he was very deeply afflicted by the loss of his son.

He made a much greater show of affliction when his brother, Sir Wolsey, died somewhat suddenly. Poor Sir Wolsey had been wandering about the gardens and shrubberies one fine day. After an absence much longer than was usual with him, some one was sent to look after him, and found him on the grass by the sun-dial, struck with paralysis. He lost then the little sense that he ever had had, and never spoke articulately again. In about six months another attack carried the poor man off.

People said, but no proof can be found that they were right, that after he made his will, Sir Wolsey led a very miserable life, and that he would complain and cry to the older servants, and declare that nobody but himself knew what his sufferings were. There will be gossiping everywhere. Certain it is, that there could not have been greater demonstrations of sorrow than there were at Traseaden Hall when Sir Wolsey Salusbury departed this life. The mourning did not last long, it is true; but Sir Chesterfield Salusbury, the new baronet, was known to be a very active-minded man, and he probably was unremitting in business and in field-sport, because they were the best solace for his grief.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

FRESH STRANDS—A NAVAL HERO.

SEVENTEEN years have slipped away since the death of Lady Salusbury. That event occurred in 1796, and it is now the beginning of 1813. Of the intervening period, which in this narrative is left a blank, history has had a great deal to say. The star of Nelson had risen and set. The fame of Napoleon had reached its supreme height. Wellington's greatness was fast ripening. Little England had been challenging the attention of Europe, and of the world generally, in an unprecedented manner. On the ocean her flag is "the sceptre all who meet obey;" she has wellnigh cleared the waters of enemies, and she is scoring up a list of military successes that has also lifted up her heart. These matters are hinted at here because they ought to be borne in the reader's mind; they have had much to do with directing the lives and forming the characters of many who will now be on our scene. But of old friends first.

Dorothy and Eleanor Clowance are still alive—middle-aged women, of course; but Time has laid his hand on them lightly. They are unmarried, though both have had lovers. Dorothy, whom more than one man would have wedded, was not easy to satisfy in regard of character and habits; Eleanor, who let love plead as freely as prudence, has not attracted such serious admiration as her sister. The general result is, that they are both old maids. They are not, however, now living together without any other companion, as when they were last mentioned; they have somewhat enlarged the borders of their tent.

Una, their youngest sister, who was just named on a former page as being at school in Bath, is now domesticated in the

house at Veorse. She is a young woman, possessed of considerable beauty; soft, gentle, and kind; endued with strong common sense as to most things, but maintaining peculiar and obstinate views on some few points; these points, or the chief of them, are connected with the affections. Una, young as she is compared with her sisters, has, nevertheless, done with her *première jeunesse*. This would never have been inferred from her appearance; her eye is as bright as it has ever been, and her cheek as fair. Dorothy and Eleanor treat her as a very young and inexperienced thing, and maintain a motherly control over her. Una calls Dorothy "Sister," and Eleanor she addresses as "Sister Eleanor."

The house at Veorse had yet another inmate of the family, but this fourth has not been mentioned on these pages, because she (for it is a lady) could hardly lisp when the first period of the story closed. Possibly it may be in the reader's recollection that the Misses Clowance once spoke of sending a turkey to their married sister Fanny, who resided somewhere in Rutland. It may be remembered, too, that Fanny's appetite was said to be weak and uncertain. Well, Fanny's appetite became strong and healthy again after that, and its recovery was almost coincident with the appearance in the theatre of this world of her daughter Doris Adair. The little matter of the turkey occurred nearly a year after Lady Salusbury's death, and it preceded Doris Adair's birth by only a few weeks. As, therefore, this second period of the narrative commences seventeen years after the death of the poor lady, Doris is clearly about entering her seventeenth year.

Now it had often been said—until it became a proverb—of the house to which these ladies belonged, that it had never produced a plain woman. Women of different degrees of comeliness represented it, of course. But all of them were to be admired for some quality or other. And as if beauty were an attribute of the race which no crossing of the blood could subdue, and which would clear itself of stain, and reassert itself spite of coarse graftings, every second generation or so it would present the times with an especially lovely specimen. Doris Adair was one of its *chefs-d'œuvre*.

By the way, a moment's patience is here asked that it may be explained how that expression, used above, "the house to which these ladies belonged," ought to be received. It does not mean their father's house. The name of Clowance, though a good enough name, was looked upon by them as an accident which should by no means interfere with the descent which was their pride. They cared to own only their kinship with the old

house of Deane. They were Deanes, they said, whatever other name they might bear. Lady Salusbury had been Miss Deane before she was Mrs Bathurst. Just now the males of the house were scarcer than the females. And, judging by this circumstance, and by the alienation of the Traseaden property, which had occurred at Lady Salusbury's death, many wise people were of opinion that the fulfilment of an old prophecy was at hand, which said that the lands of Deane would be estranged by one lady of the house, and subsequently recovered by another. Eaden, as perhaps the reader has already observed, is but the anagram of Deane. The family was named in old charters both Eaden and Deane; the estate was always Eaden or Eadne, with a prefix, Torres-eaden, Tors-eaden, Trias-eaden, and others, the result of all which was Tras-eaden, now the settled name.

Now the Clowance ladies had, among themselves, talked about Traseaden and their Deane ancestry much more since the death of Sir Wolsey Salusbury, when they lost all hope of the property, than before that event, when they looked upon it as their heritage. And in so doing they probably acted much as nine-tenths of the world would have acted in similar circumstances. Any good which we have missed by some envious and unexpected chance becomes from the date of the mishap an object of the tenderest affection and regret, and we multiply our disappointments by continually renewing them in our minds. We are proud of saying, "I can never forget that I was born to this;" or, "If justice were done, that would be mine; let them who will acquiesce in the iniquity, I never can; I will proclaim my ownership as long as I live." Yet, if the good things be gone and past praying for, wisdom would surely counsel a speedy forgetting of them as preferable to the nursing and the daily renewal of grief; and one fails to see what there is to be proud of in the fostering of vain regrets.

Yes, Traseaden—the Honour of Traseaden, as they were fond of calling it, for the old lordship contained more than one manor—was their constant theme. And now, too, the perfidy of Sir Wolsey Salusbury, in regard to his offer of marriage, which had previously been treated with lofty contempt, was, since the fell consequences of it were apparent, exalted to the dignity of treason, and condemned accordingly. The poor old baronet's memory, if it was thus kept fresh, was preserved in a very sharp pickle; and if his ghost listened, as Yorick's is understood to have done, for reflections on his life, it must have often undergone excruciating discipline. It is true that, after denunciation of him had gone a little way, calmer counsels always prevailed, and it was remembered that he was a very

weak, silly old man, and only a tool in the hands of a greater offender, who was not generally mentioned by name, but as to whose name nobody had the slightest doubt. But Sir Wolsey sleeps well after life's fitful fever, or rather, in his case, after life's tedious burden; and perhaps his ghost is as indifferent as he was himself to terrestrial affairs, and is more pleasantly occupied than in earthly eavesdropping.

Sir Chesterfield Salusbury was still alive, and a tolerably hearty old man. His manners were prepossessing, and nobody ever thought of denying that he could be very agreeable. When first he came to Traseaden, people even said that he was a benevolent and considerate man; but somehow, with lapse of time, these attributes dropped out of his reputation, and it became customary to say, regarding his compliments and offers of service, and especially his promises to pay, that it would be wiser not to take him exactly at his word.

Sir Chesterfield was not "given to hospitality;" but he knew that opening his house to people who had anything to give, was a means of becoming the recipient of their gifts. So there was company at the Hall occasionally, and a good deal of gaiety; for the old baronet knew that it would be better not to assemble the world at all, than, having assembled it, to let it be bored. Once or twice was the celebrated Mr Sheridan a guest at Traseaden, but that was in the earlier days of Sir Chesterfield's ownership: after the wit grew infirm, and after the Prince Regent began to neglect him, Sir Chesterfield Salusbury was not so urgent for his company. Moreover, towards the period at which the story reopens, Mr Sheridan was becoming much an invalid, and no longer so brilliant as he had been.

Sir Chesterfield's wife, Lady Salusbury, still hung on hand. She had falsified the opinions which allowed her only a short life, and was, indeed, rather less of an invalid now than she had been when middle-aged. Her husband's habits were becoming more domestic as he grew old. The consciousness that she was of some importance to his comfort seemed to soften him; or, perhaps, age and quiet made him a little thoughtful and considerate. At any rate, her ladyship's life was not such a constant punishment as it had once been. She had two or three kind friends among her neighbours, and was permitted to exercise a little discretion as to quiet company at the Hall.

Lady Salusbury, in her tidying of the house, and rearrangements of furniture, had come across numerous evidences of the intimate footing on which the Clowance family had once been at Traseaden. She knew that they were near relations of her predecessor, and she was aware that they had experienced some

ill-usage from her husband's family, though she did not understand the extent of the wrong. Moreover, she learned from all sides in what estimation the Miss Clowances—that is to say, the elder pair—were held, and that they were pleasant company, and great acquisitions at a tea-table. She also knew that there were younger ladies in their house, who might now and then brighten the dreariness of her home. And she wished to be acquainted, and possibly intimate, with the Clowances. It might be some little compensation to them for old Sir Wolsey's behaviour, if they should be received by her on intimate terms; and she would thus, as she thought, add to her agreeable acquaintances, and secure companions who must know the old place as well as she did, and who must be full of the history of it as it was in the late Lady Salusbury's time.

She had not the least knowledge of how Sir Chesterfield would be disposed in this matter. He might dislike the ladies, or he might have reasons of his own, or family reasons, for desiring to keep them at a distance. It behoved her, therefore, to sound his inclinations with the utmost caution. Long she hesitated about mentioning them at all; and most timid was her reference when first she mustered courage to approach the subject. But the Clowances had long ceased to be stumbling-blocks in Sir Chesterfield's way; and it was astonishing how amiably he entertained the notion of being friends with them again. They were good whist-players, discreet talkers, of unexceptionable behaviour, and of good family.

"By [shall we say *George*?], yes," said Sir Chesterfield. "How odd that I didn't think before of making all straight with the old girls! Damn it, yes. Try if you can get 'em to come this way again."

This was more encouragement than her ladyship expected, and she set about opening communications with alacrity. But she soon found that she had little understood the people towards whom she would have made advances. "Lady Salusbury!" said Dorothy, when the matter was first opened to her; "why, what can the woman be thinking of? I put my foot in Traseaden Hall! I enter a house which is contaminated by the presence of that serpent!"

"Lady Salusbury!" said Eleanor; "why, she must be dreaming. Some of the old swords would fall from their scabbards if we went in. The roof-tree would come down. Our old friend would break from her grave and rebuke us!"

There was very little reciprocation of poor Lady Salusbury's feeling. How the old gentlewomen did bristle! How grandly and how emphatically did they decline the proffered acquaintance!

They did not wish to wound Lady Salusbury's feelings. They believed that she was a victim of that bad man. But into his house they would never set foot. He was treachery and guile personified. They could not speak their contempt and detestation of him.

Should they visit *his* wife in a house which, but for his vile intrigues, would have been theirs? Should they, by any act of theirs, seem to countenance crimes which deserved the highest penalties of the law? No, they would preserve a broad barrier between themselves and such baseness. They only wondered that any persons, calling themselves noble or gentle, could think that they could enter Traseaden Hall at present without contamination. Eleanor said the man was a rogue, and that was all about it. Dorothy said that whatever other persons might think proper to do, they would show how they hated and despised a character like that of Sir Chesterfield Salusbury.

Dunstan, the only son of Sir Chesterfield, died, as was stated on a former page. What had become of his widow nobody at Traseaden knew, and it has not been surmised that anybody cared. It is possible that she might have returned to Dunstan after the family were once happily domesticated at Traseaden Hall, and all scandal had blown over, if only he had lived a little longer. But his early death prevented this. It took away all chance of her being the baronet's wife; and she did not care to leave the exciting life of camps and capitals, to live as a widow in an English country house. That might happen hereafter in her son's days of possession; but it should not be at present. Some of Dunstan's old acquaintances understood that about this time she was in the confidential employ of Prince Metternich, and getting substantial reward for her service.

The two sons of Dunstan, Chatham and Wolsey, had their home at Traseaden. One of them was a member of Parliament for a rotten borough, the patron of which was an old friend of Sir Chesterfield; that was Chatham. The other inherited some of his father's tastes, and was fond of betting and play; and, unfortunately, he had not the reputation of being a scrupulous player.

As more will be seen of the family by-and-by, it was thought necessary to mention these particulars at opening another period of the story.

The sisters Clowance were but poorly endowed for daughters of the house of Deane. They had received each a legacy at Lady Salusbury's death, and their parents and other relations had made for them some provision. Doris Adair had rather more means than either of them. And so, by keeping house all

together, they were able to live comfortably, although they could afford but little indulgence.

Time had passed not altogether roughly with the family since we saw them last. The deaths, first of Doris's mother, and then of her father, had been severe shocks; but shocks are not like wearing cares,—they pass, and all is serene again. But,—it had almost slipped from notice,—yes, there was a sort of skeleton, of course; there always is. The skeleton was Una's affair, and yet Una was the one who least regarded it as a skeleton.

Six years ago—yes, it was now six years, that is to say, in 1806; how the time flew!—a young naval officer had come home to visit his relations at Veorse, and to get a little relaxation after many years of trying duties. Lieutenant Oakley had served with some distinction. It had been his good fortune to be, in his early service, at the battle of the Nile, where he escaped unhurt, and where his performances as a midshipman did not attract much notice; then to be employed in one of our most fortunate cruisers; and afterwards to be present in the great affair of Trafalgar, where he was wounded. He got his lieutenancy in the great promotion which followed the victory; was, as soon as his wound healed, appointed to a ship, and in her served with credit, until from an accident she had to go to Portsmouth and undergo a lengthy refitting. During her detention there, he took the opportunity of obtaining the leave to which he was so well entitled.

Oakley's achievements delighted the inhabitants of Veorse, where he had been known as a boy; they watched his career with the greatest interest; and when he was reported to have been wounded in the crowning victory of Trafalgar, and when he was promoted in consequence, his fame rose very high in Veorse, and he was there marked out for the highest honours of his profession. That Mr Oakley's wound was but slight was there looked upon as some set-off against the loss of Nelson; for, said the sagest of the gossips there, he is quite certain to be a second Nelson before long; *le roi est mort, vive le roi!*

If he had returned home while the fame of the battle was quite young, it is probable that he might have received worship sufficient to turn his (a pretty hard) head; but time enough elapsed before his appearance there to allow enthusiasm to subside to a moderate heat. Plenty of it, however, was left to make his reception exceedingly flattering. Not only in the little town itself, but in all that part of the Furze Range which lies near it, he was greeted with fervour. A hero has the advantage of a prophet, and does get honour in his own country,

until the population becomes accustomed to him and his renown. Public bodies, private associations, and influential individuals vied one with the other in showing him respect, and the vulgar stared and shouted after him, every man who could invent a pretext for speaking to him and claiming his recognition straining to do so.

If this was his meed from the inhabitants in general, what must have been the homage offered to him by the fair sex! and how intoxicating must it have been! It was the opinion of other bachelors in that place, that Lieutenant Oakley had only to choose his mate from among all the ladies great and small of the neighbourhood; it was their sole consolation that he could marry only one, and that probably he would not condescend to take a wife at all from that country. However, whatever he might intend to do about matrimony, it is certain that he appreciated the high place which he enjoyed in the estimation of the fair, that he revelled in their favour and basked in their smiles.

Now, from what has already been said of the Clowance ladies, it may readily be divined that, whatever admiration they might have felt for Mr Oakley's undoubted merit, they would keep strictly within the bounds of propriety in expressing it, and by no means challenge the young hero's notice any more than they would that of another bachelor. None in their hearts honoured him more than they. Eleanor, out of whom the fire of chivalry had not burned, spite of her age, was at home eloquent in her praises, and wished that she had been fifteen years younger. Even the staid Dorothy pronounced Oakley to be "a young man that his family might well be proud of," and prophesied future successes for him.

"If adulation does not turn his head," observed the Reverend Percival Clowance.

"It will not do that," answered Miss Clowance; "he is bearing it very well,—not inordinately elated. They are a sensible family. He will not be spoiled, you will see."

"If he is not spoiled, it won't be the ladies' fault," objected her brother. "I never saw anything like the way in which they set their caps at him. The other night old Mr Burridge was asking his opinion about some matter of coast defence, and left his seat for a moment to find some plates that explained the thing, when Miss Prinkett crossed over and dropped into the seat as quick as lightning, though there was not another lady on that side of the room."

"Oh, Miss Prinkett!" said Dorothy, in tones which indicated that Miss Prinkett held a low place in her estimation.

"And what do you think of Miss Archer and Miss Nelly Goode having a loud quarrel at Mrs Delany's party, because there had been some mistake about the dances for which he was engaged to them? I heard they were quite violent."

"The young man, I am told, is pestered all day long with notes and presents and tender messages. They fee the servants, and find out what his engagements are, and waylay him. Annie Mallow slavered him in a disgusting manner; and fancy fat Miss Pompion fainting in his arms! Who was this that I heard of that seized his elbow, hooked herself to him, and would not let him go? The rules of modesty seem to be suspended by general consent. It isn't Miss Prinkett and her sort alone," put in the clergyman's wife.

"Not by common consent, I hope. There must surely be at least one exception. Tell me that the Republic has not been carried away in the general chase," said the parson.

The French Republic had in past years emphatically declared itself to be One: Una therefore had been, by her brother's juvenile humour, designated "the Republic," and had not quite lost the name.

The Republic, contrary to the nature of that form of government, was not prompt to answer for itself, but Miss Clowance said—

"No, I am certain that you will never find Una forward in seeking a gentleman's notice. And she will be careful to avoid the appearance of such a thing, while so many young women are laying themselves open to remark."

"Some allowance ought to be made," ventured Eleanor. "Mr Oakley isn't an ordinary person. I hope I should never do anything unbecoming, but I couldn't for my life treat him coldly if I were a girl. Heroes are privileged."

"Eleanor!" said Miss Clowance; "Eleanor, I am astonished at you! You are speaking without reflection. If heroes are privileged, young women are not. Never forget that, Una, my dear."

"No, you can't be too careful," added the Reverend Percival.

The Republic grew very red, probably at sister Eleanor's remark, with which she sympathised. She may have been thinking, too, of the heavy sacrifices which propriety sometimes requires of us, without desiring to outstep propriety in any way. Miss Clowance seemed to divine her thought, for she presently said—

"Men don't like to be courted. No man of sense is ever captivated by unwomanly behaviour. You will see that these pushing ladies will be disappointed."

"But you know, Dorothy, Oakley is a very good fellow,—always was," observed Percival.

"I think so, certainly. He was a nice, spirited boy, and from what little I have seen of him since his return, I think him an open-hearted, honourable man."

"You may well say, 'from what little you have seen of him,'" said Mrs Percival. "Unless you join the besieging army, as I call it, you don't exchange three words with him."

"Well, wait," said Dorothy, with a little shake of the head.

Now, in this conversation, which occurred very soon after Oakley's return, Miss Clowance had not felt quite so satisfied with her own doctrines as she could have wished. She had no doubt that she was right; but at the same time it was vexatious to think that a pretty, sweet, modest girl like Una must make her choice between neglect, which was not justly her portion, and unseemly behaviour, which wasn't in her nature. There was a large, bold, handsome girl in Veorse, usually allowed to be the beauty; and there were two misses, an affected and an insipid, either of whom might have been admirable if she had had a grain of sense; but Una Clowance, as Dorothy well knew, was not behind these in looks, and was immensely before them in manners and information. The Clowance beauty, of which mention has been made, was a distinguishing beauty. It had a spirit in it. It had given ideas as well as furnished subjects to painters. Dorothy was not without a little rebellious feeling in her heart while she so calmly taught Una her duty.

But Dorothy was right. She had at last the intense gratification of saying, "I told you so," and having none to gainsay her.

CHAPTER II.

DIFFIDENCE WINS—DUTY CALLS.

A great public ball took place as soon after Oakley's return as consisted with the due preparation of dresses for so important an occasion. All, from far and near, who had any connection with Veorse, came to it. Delicate girls, whose shoulders ought never to have been uncovered, braved all dangers, and attended in draperies ill suited to the climate. Two sisters were there in mourning, whose third sister had not been six months in her grave. Widows of no great seniority; deserted

maidens, who last month had looked to only the tomb for rest; spinsters, who had for five years retired from the active duties of man-taking; cripples, devotees, gathered to the entertainment, as if they had been the daughters of Sion and this the great feast of Tammuz.

Oakley was by this time beginning to discover that there may be too much even of a good thing. Every true sailor worships the girls according to a rational conception of that duty; but to have the sex set upon him *en masse*, to be beleaguered and stormed by petticoats, is not a part of the whole duty of man, nautical or otherwise.

Country dances were the chief exercises at this ball. "Exercises" is a very proper word, for the dances made exorbitant calls upon the muscles. Oakley was coursing down the middle and up again, and after every course executing intricate manœuvres to right and left, in tow (as he called it) of a lady of uncertain age and of beauty not unquestionable, who had secured him for a partner somehow, who triumphed in the possession of him, and who forced him over every inch of floor which the strictest rules of the dance required to be trodden. Ladies of the standing couples watched for Oakley, seized him as soon as he came opposite to them, prolonged the little interlude during which they took him from his own partner, and tried to converse with him if never so briefly.

He had escaped from a very impressive lady, about the middle of the dance, had tripped down some yards beyond the last couple (his partner refusing to return sooner), and, having regained the manœuvring point, was preparing to be seized upon as usual, when he found to his surprise no violent grasp laid on him, and he literally was obliged to go up to the next lady and to offer his hand to her. The offer was met by a pretty little soft hand, which was bashfully surrendered to his, and which was the property of Miss Una Clowance. Una's head was a little averted, and her look was on the floor as she began to move. Oakley, seldom left to begin a conversation, had been taken aback, and had remained silent up to the time when it was necessary to change hands and get back to where Una started from. Then he spoke hastily, whispering to Una, "I hope you will not engage yourself any deeper. I am coming to try my fortune after this dance." He saw the colour mount up into Una's temples, and caught one capsizing (his expression) glance from her eyes, which she raised for an instant. Then he was once more in the grip of his warder, and made to show his paces to the assembly.

The dance over, he made vain efforts to shake off his partner, who had formed some wild scheme of dancing with him again.

But he also had a scheme, and meant to carry it out. He led her round the room until they reached a bench where, between Sister and sister Eleanor, Una, glowing from her dance, had just seated herself on being surrendered by her partner. The young man said a few polite words to the elder ladies, and then petitioned for Una's hand for the first dance in which it might be disposable. "After the next," said Una quietly. "Thank you, Miss Una," said the sailor, and moved away.

Una, delighted, sat somehow like a guilty person, and did not look at either sister. Eleanor let one gleam of triumph shoot towards Dorothy, and then composed her look. Dorothy made no sign at all. They then spoke of the next dance as if there were no particular interest attaching to the one after that; and, as they talked, Una's little heart had time to steady itself, and she was quite calm when her partner came to lead her to the dance preceding that which she was to dance with Oakley.

After she stood up (not yet with Oakley), Dorothy gave a little nod to Eleanor, and said, "Very polite. I quite expected it."

"Oh, Dorothy, I am so delighted!" answered Eleanor. "I am sure the child was longing to dance with him."

"Since it has come in the proper way, I am delighted too," returned Dorothy. And then they began to keep watch on Una's figure as it flitted about the dance.

Meanwhile Mr Oakley was taking a liberty such as only very distinguished personages (as he was this evening) may venture to take. He had besought Una to give him any dance that she could, as if he were equally free for all. And so he was in a sense: that is, he was engaged for every one. Nevertheless was he determined to have her for his partner in any dance that she might name. When he had engaged her, he went to excuse himself to her who should have been his partner of right. He was very sorry, but there had been some mistake about the dances, and he found he wasn't free for the next but one. The fair one knew that it would be useless to dispute or to show resentment at what an autocrat chose to do, although in her heart she was bitterly mortified. But she asked him, with a smile, to whom he fancied himself engaged for the dance then about to begin. "To Miss Marston," he said. "Ah, I see," she retorted, "there's been a mistake all through. This is the one which I am to dance with you." And she rose and took his arm, saying, "I'll explain to Miss Marston;" which she did in a very off-hand manner, after having crossed to where that lady sat expectant, saying—

"There has been a mistake all through, dear, as Mr Oakley

will explain to you. This is my dance, and yours must be farther on."

Before Miss Marston could frame an answer to this usurpation, the usurper was off and taking her place in the ladies' row, while bitter thoughts formed themselves in Miss Marston's gentle breast.

By-and-by Oakley came with his eyes glistening and led away pretty Una. The country dance does not allow to partners much opportunity of conversing, except in short snatches and at full speed; but Oakley managed during this dance to say enough to make Una think him very agreeable. She asked to be led back to her sisters as soon as the dance was over, and the young man took her back, protesting as he did so that he was entitled to one turn fore and aft. As Una took her seat he asked for another dance to compensate for loss of the promenade, and this was accorded, but not till after tea.

At the Veorse balls it was usual to break the entertainment and rest the dancers by taking tea at a stated hour. During the tea interval Oakley had a chance of reflecting for five minutes, and decided that, if he wanted to enjoy Una's society, he must propitiate her sisters. Accordingly, when he came to claim Una for the second time, he asked if Miss Eleanor would not do him the favour of dancing with him. Eleanor said that she had given up dancing, which he professed himself concerned to hear; but then, in a minute recollecting himself, he said, "But you will surely dance the last dance; honour me with your hand for that?"

The last dance was peculiar, as being for everybody. Old bachelors, old spinsters, dowagers, grandsires, joined in it and were blameless, because the custom of the country prescribed that nobody who could at all scramble through should be bound to refrain. Here was a perfectly legitimate opportunity of dancing with the hero of the evening; and Eleanor, if truth be told, would have given the best tooth in her head to have engaged herself then and there to do so. But she knew that they always retired early, and was obliged to decline. When he persisted in entreaty, the most he could obtain was a conditional promise that if they stayed to the end she would be very happy.

It is believed that Eleanor, if she had consulted only her own wishes, would have set precedent at defiance. But they seldom stayed for the last dance, because of the general scramble of cloaking and parting which followed it; and they thought it most unadvisable to break through their custom on an evening like this, when Una had been distinguished by the hero of the

occasion. Dorothy said that they ought to go, and Eleanor acquiesced. "You will lose your dance with Mr Oakley, sister Eleanor," said Una, when after having danced she was exhorted to make ready for retreat. "Mr Oakley was polite enough to ask me," answered sister Eleanor, steadily, "but he will be better off with a younger partner, and it is really time for going to rest. We began early, Una, and you have had quite a long evening." This was heroic. The heroism, it is feared, cost Eleanor a tear or two afterwards in solitude.

When Oakley came to claim his partner, he was nettled at finding that the Clowance ladies had departed. Ladies in general were only too mindful of, and too punctual in regard to, engagements which it might be his pleasure to make with them. Miss Eleanor Clowance, indeed! And, besides, he had hoped to wish Miss Una Clowance good-night, perhaps to escort her home, for the ladies' home was not far from the ball-room, and, as the night was fair, they walked back.

"Devilish cool of the old girls to slip their cables that way, and leave their berth with the younger craft in tow," he thought. It is not certain that he altogether refrained from imagining some sort of social vengeance; undoubtedly, he determined to be very *nonchalant* and grand about the delinquency; but the end of it was that somehow he made a very early call at the house, and excused the untimely visit by the expression of a fear that indisposition or some *contretemps* had decided their departure.

No, there had been nothing the matter. The ladies did not in general stay late at parties. Miss Eleanor reminded him that she said they might be obliged to go. There was not a bit of salve for his *amour propre*; but there was the satisfaction of seeing Miss Una fresh and glowing, as if she had had a very sufficient night's rest. The elder sisters did the general talking; but Una, when she was pointedly addressed, as frequently she was, could not choose but answer, and her answers were sensible and becoming. The young man was treated with the greatest respect, as if his superiority were felt and admitted, but there was no evidence of a disposition to make prize of him. Neither was there the least reason to suppose that shyness kept back indications of delight at his attention in making the early visit. The ladies were quite collected and frank in all they had to say; and even Una, whose eyes sought the carpet a good deal, would, if any merry incident of the night before were recalled, lift her lids for a moment, and laugh the most enchanting little laugh, adding here and there a piquant remark of her own, which proved her to have been pretty observant, and to

have had bright ideas, though she had chosen not to be communicative of them.

So refreshing did the lieutenant find the little circle, that he let an hour pass before he thought of moving. Then more visitors came, smiled to see him there, and remembered that he had danced twice with Miss Una the night before.

Mrs Clack, who was still alive, had not waited for the morning to tell about a discovery which she, by dint of a keen instinct and long experience, had been enabled to make. "I don't say he'll marry her," said Mrs Clack,—“probably he won't; but Miss Una Clowance is going to be his favourite. If he only amuses himself with her, it will be another disappointment in that family, and I shall be sorry.”

“Miss Una Clowance, indeed!” exclaimed many a skilful man-trapper, with a toss of her head. “Mr Oakley is a man of discernment, and not likely to be taken with that insipid, blushing nonentity. He can appreciate something more *piquante* than that, I can tell you.” Yet Mrs Clack was right, and all the world presently acknowledged that she had been so, and disappointed enslavers had to bear the truth as best they might.

No competitor was successful. The prize fell at the feet of one who sought it not, but to whom it was, nevertheless, most acceptable. The pride and glory of such a conquest were quite comprehended in the secret romance of Una's breast; and Eleanor, who thought more of the pride and glory than of anything else, did not fail to magnify the achievement in domestic conversation. Sober-minded Dorothy impressed upon Una, with quite a tiresome iteration, that it was a secondary consideration how many ladies might have been willing to marry Lieutenant Oakley. The points for congratulation were, that he was of good family, that he was considered an honourable, sincere, frank young sailor, and that he had already laid the foundation of a reputation which would very likely rise to be conspicuous.

But it is doing Una an injustice to speak of exultation in the capture as a dominant feeling with her, or to imagine that prudential considerations were much entertained by her, except when Dorothy preached, and chased away pleasanter thoughts. Oakley's admiration was so genuine, and he spoke and acted with such hearty warmth, that he had no difficulty in winning poor little Una's heart,—the fee simple, all of it,—which she surrendered “as to her lord, her governor, and king.” If she knew nothing of the tricks by which swains are attracted, she knew nothing of suspicion or fear. To her, her lover was

everything that she would have him to be ; she believed in him as thoroughly as she admired him.

Oakley, for his part, did not disguise his preference. He toasted Una, and praised openly her beauty, her quiet manners, her dancing, her good sense. In doing so he doubtless provoked the hatred of many a rival of Una ; yet such was the worship which had been accorded to him, that rivals dared not openly show their spite, but vied with each other in bending at the shrine where he thought proper to pay his vows. Una partook of his celebrity. The retiring house of Clowance was taken by force, as it were, and made prominent in spite of itself.

When affairs of the heart are in progress, a very few weeks pass like a watch of the night. When a young officer has a short leave of absence to be happy among his friends, that too is apt to speed away at an incredible pace. Oakley and Una were, at this period, certainly of the class whom time gallops withal. Oakley's leave had nearly run out ; but one guesses without being told that, in his circumstances, he was pressed by urgent private affairs, and that he entreated that a short extension of leave might be granted him. This was a difficult matter to arrange, as the ship was nearly ready, and it was expected that she would be ordered to sea as soon as she should be reported complete. But the captain was a good-natured man, and Oakley was somewhat of a favourite with him. And so it was arranged with the admiral, that the young man should remain with his friends until the repairs were so near completion as would leave only time sufficient for a letter to reach him, and for him to repair to Portsmouth. He was thus, as he said, uncertain from day to day of the extent of his sojourn at Veorse. His blue Peter was flying, and his anchor a-peak.

CHAPTER III.

A FORSAKEN DAMSEL.

There had been, as everybody was allowed to witness, very decided love-making, the delights of which, it is presumed, the two principals did not desire to change for the more sober certainty of engaged bliss ; for no word had passed concerning the exchange of hearts. The barter was acted openly

enough, but there was no pledge of faith, no plan of the future. Was this wrong? Perhaps so; but then what a short time the whole wooing had lasted, and how full that time had been of incidents, and amusements, and phrases, and looks, and deeds! a whirl of excitement, without much time as yet for calm and quiet consideration of the tendency of all these things. By streams or in groves such ardent affection must have been spoken; even in humdrum domestic life it could not have been voiceless; but the *fêteing* of a hero makes a busy time, when routine of love-making is much dispensed with.

Oakley went to dine with a club in a town fifteen miles from Veorsa. He was to sleep there, and to return next day. In the evening arrived an express bearing a letter for him *on His Majesty's Service*, which was said to be so urgent that his friends deemed it right to send it on to him at once. It reached him after dinner, in the middle of a merry evening, and rather dashed his pleasure. The ship had been ordered to sail on a certain day with sealed orders. The number of workmen had been doubled, so as to have her ready by the appointed day. Consequently there did not remain time for him to proceed to Portsmouth if communicated with by the ordinary post; it was even doubted whether an express would be in time, but everything was done to give him a chance of arriving.

As soon as he had read the summons he saw that not a moment was to be lost. He took leave of his entertainers; wrote a hasty note to his relatives in Veorsa, explaining what had happened, and desiring that his trunks might be sent after him to take their chance of being forwarded by some early opportunity; and set off in a post-chaise, promising a heavy guerdon to the post-boy if he did the first stage in a given time.

Next day there was, as may be supposed, some excitement in Veorsa. The observed of all observers had been suddenly withdrawn from the little town; the mainspring of the unwonted action of which it had been the scene had vanished, and the works were at a standstill; coming parties were deprived of their chief attraction; the further wiles and plots of gentle beings had been invented to no purpose, for they could not now come into use. Never was such a collapse; it made one think of the Parliament cellars an hour after Guy had been grabbed—everything prepared for brisk movement, but the moving power unavoidably absent.

People may have been stunned and aghast for a space, but they were not likely to stand long in the market-place listening to vague and conflicting reports. Certainly not; they recovered

shortly, and went off to what they thought to be the centres of correct information to verify the news and to learn particulars. Many went to the house of Oakley's sister; but as many more went to Miss Clowance's.

Now the first fell intimation of what had happened came to the sisters Clowance by the mouths of some of these searchers after truth. Had Mr Oakley been really ordered off to his ship at a minute's notice? Was it a fact that the enemy's fleet had been seen off the Isle of Wight? Was Oakley made a commodore or an admiral? Did he not expect to make an end of the foe, and to be back again in a fortnight? These inquiries, and others like them, were literally showered upon the ladies, who, being no better informed than the world at large, could of course contribute nothing to the public enlightenment.

And then the public mind took a sudden turn. The Miss Clowances, as it imagined, were calm and self-possessed when they gave their answers—not at all like persons who heard a piece of bad news for the first time. They knew more than they chose to say. They would not tell positive untruths—nobody believed them capable of that; but they probably guessed pretty accurately what was the matter. Then it was hinted that Oakley found he was getting into a serious scrape; that no sane person could believe that an officer with his prospects would throw himself away upon a country girl like that. He had taken the alarm, or his friends had become alarmed for him; rather late, it was true, but time enough to save *him*, which was the main point. As to the silly people who had thought that he could be possibly serious, they would be severely punished for their presumption.

Young ladies, who thought it better not to be premature in dealing about judgments, lest things should unhappily come right again, were sympathetic rather than denunciatory; they really felt for poor Una—so satisfied and truthful as she appeared—it must be a terrible blow—she would get over it probably—they hoped she would; but she could never be the same person again—so cruel a disappointment (and the poor thing was very sensitive) must damage her appearance materially.

Before night there was a nice little, round, unvarnished tale current in the circle over which Mrs Clack presided. Everybody, it was said, must have remarked that it was an odd move for so devoted an admirer as Mr Oakley had appeared to be, to go off for a dinner with a country club when he knew that the days of his leave were numbered. Of course it was explained now. It was a device for making his escape without any fuss. As for the ship being ordered to sea, no doubt she

would go to sea some time or other, but perhaps not quite in such haste as had been reported. Unfortunately, it was ascertained that there had been something very like a rupture. Miss Una had had some tantrums—had wept and wished herself dead, and resorted to other well-known specifics for awakening the faculties of backward and intractable swains. Oakley being rather too sensible to give way under this species of torture, the clerical brother had been used, who, finding the lover take a very nautical view of the affair, had spoken strongly to him, and there had been in fact a row. After such an adventure, Oakley's position in Veorse would be quite changed, and he did well to withdraw before this reverse could come. The Clowances were an unfortunate family, certainly. Mrs Clack had no doubt that Mrs Blight could remember how Miss Clowance had been equally ill-used by the late Sir Wolsey Salusbury.

The Clowances were, without doubt, rather astonished to find that Oakley had gone to Portsmouth instead of returning to Veorse, as they had expected. Mrs Stanshon, Oakley's sister, came to their house soon after the gossips had been there, and explained the matter. She showed how hurried he had been, and that he had barely time to write her ten lines. He had charged her to say his adieux to all his kind friends, and especially—*especially*, she repeated, to the Miss Clowances. "I am sure," said kind Mrs Stanshon, "that after your being so friendly together he would have written to some of you if he possibly could. You may be certain that whenever he gets a few moments disposable he will write to you. I answer for him that he will. It is not like my brother to be neglectful of his best friends."

However unpleasant such an abrupt departure might be, it is one of the chances of a sailor's life. The Clowances knew this, and were too wise "to rail on lady Fortune in set terms" because a highly probable contingency had arrived. Mr Oakley would write immediately; had, no doubt, already written, though when he would be near a post-office again was uncertain. It was distressing; but they would be much to blame if they treated what was only an annoying *contretemps* as a serious misfortune. They would live to laugh over the terrible catastrophe. Meanwhile Miss Clowance speedily "shut up," as the saying is, both scorers and sympathisers. She and her house preserved an equal demeanour; spoke of Mr Oakley when it was necessary, but not as of a person in whose doings they had a principal concern, and showed that, let chafe who might, their house was not frightened from its propriety.


The dignified front shown by the Clowances, though it might

ward off impertinence from themselves, could have but little effect in silencing or counteracting the chatter which was busy on all sides. But another force came very conveniently and effectively to the rescue. Mrs Stanshon had spoken delicately to the sisters about her brother's probable conduct, but to two or three leading inhabitants of Veorse she spoke with less reserve. Her brother, she said, whatever he might have said or left unsaid, was in honour bound to propose to Una Clowance, and she had not the least doubt that he intended to make her his wife. He might be inconsiderate, but he was not heartless or dishonourable; and as for his trifling with the affections of such a dear little thing as Una, such behaviour was impossible. They might rely on it that everything would come right. Her announcement was a great discouragement to the scandal-mongers and those who desired confusion.

Mrs Stanshon was the wife of a major in the army. Her husband was abroad, serving with his regiment. She was greatly mortified at her brother so sullyng, as she thought, the honourable name which he had gained.

And Una herself? Why, in taking account of those who were this way or that way affected by Oakley's departure, is Una last mentioned? Simply because it is not agreeable to contemplate the distress of an innocent girl, the mention of Una has been postponed; but, dislike the thought as one may, there is no avoiding it. However his actions may have influenced others, there was none whom they concerned as they did Una. And Una, poor girl, was in bitter grief; fortunately, however, not the grief of a wronged or a slighted maiden. No; hers was the simple, natural sorrow of bereavement. She had learned, she knew not how, during the last few weeks, to set a new value on her life. Familiar, everyday things had been lit up with a glory she had never seen on them before. The pianoforte in the drawing-room, her parasol, the voices of her kindred and friends, half-a-dozen illuminated cards put aside in memory of festal meetings lately past, her prayer-book, and many little household treasures, had to her been sanctified by some dear associations. Her paths had been strewn with roses, as it were. She had basked in the full sun of delight. Such enchanted periods must, alas! come to an end, as even a moderate experience teaches, but two or three weeks are a cruelly brief duration for them.

On a sudden Una's surroundings spoke no more of joy; they suggested only that joy had suffered a dismal eclipse. The rosy light had turned not to ordinary light, but to a spiritless day, which was worse than darkness. And the gloom came



so suddenly too—not without warning, but with cruel abruptness. If she could have bidden him God-speed, and charged him as a good knight to go forth and win further laurels, it would have been some consolation; but to have the curtain fall unexpectedly on their joy, to have a gulf yawn between them, and to know that he was seeking with all his desire the perilous adventures which were so plentiful on the ocean, made the parting hard to bear!

Her grief was enough afflicting. She would have wept over such a reverse if it had come upon a friend, being a sensitive, affectionate girl; and as she had to endure it herself, it must be confessed that she did not play the heroine in a strong-minded way, but was terribly crushed by her sorrow. Yet of all the many tears which she wept, not one crystal drop was shed in anger, bitterness, resentment, or even bruised self-love; Una had not the least suspicion of inconstancy or of anything blameworthy on her lover's part. There had been an untoward separation without a farewell, and the time of the next meeting was uncertain, while the hazards of a very hazardous profession darkened the prospect. But all this might be set right ere long by another turn of the wheel. So Una made her moan over the sorrowful present, but remained sanguine of the future; and as the pain of the blow abated, the brightness of hope increased, and calmed and comforted her.

It must now be told that the expectations formed by his friends in Veorse concerning Mr Oakley's probable conduct did not obtain a very rapid fulfilment. A month passed, during which the Misses Clowance thought it "very strange" that nothing was heard, and during which Mrs Stanshon reiterated her assurances that all would be well. Another month of vain expectation almost silenced Mrs Stanshon, witnessed the confession between Dorothy and Eleanor that "they didn't know what to think; it couldn't be accident,"—and drew from Mrs Clack and some of her confidants the observation that "it was the old story over again," that "it was ill setting one's endeavours too high," and that "many a forsaken damsel lived to be a healthy old woman." Una all this while thought only of the difficulties of communication caused by war and storm; but then, said she, if there were "no war, there could be no hero."

After a long while—it may have been four months—Mrs Stanshon received a letter from her brother, who was at Teneriffe, informing her that he had with difficulty joined his ship, which had already sailed from Portsmouth when he got there, that they had opened their orders in a latitude and

longitude named by him, and found that they were to watch for an enemy's squadron, which was believed to be crossing the Atlantic, and to give notice of what it was about, and of whither it appeared to be bound. Their duty had been done; a swift brig had been despatched from Madeira to the admiral of their squadron with the report, and he had, in replying, desired them to wait at Teneriffe. Oakley's baggage had reached him six or seven weeks after he had sailed. He was well, and had had but little adventure. Again he sent remembrances to all friends, and again he specially mentioned the Clowances,—nothing more.

Hereupon Mrs Stanshon wrote to him, saying how disappointed and ashamed she felt at his neglect of Una, and pointing out how his reputation would decline in Veorse if he could be guilty of dishonourable conduct towards her. She told her friends that she would disown him if he did not speedily remove the doubt which lay upon his honour. Fortunately Una complained only of the delay. She censured him not in the least—probably believed that accident alone was harassing her. But Dorothy thought it was high time now to dismiss all excusing ideas, and to look upon Mr Oakley as a traitor. Una seemed so patient that it would have been a cruelty to insist upon her receiving the truth as they saw it. Nay, was it not a mercy that the girl's nature was so confiding that she would think no ill of Oakley, and that there was a chance that the recollection of her short-lived bliss might fade gradually without any violent shock; and that she might herself be unaware of how much it had decayed, until some new affection, springing up warm and lively, should drive out the embers of it, and cause it to disappear without a regret being left behind it?

The new passion had never come. Una had many admirers, but she listened to none of them. Yet undoubtedly her love-dream did subside into a tender memory, which she seemed to prefer to a new-born joy. From expressions which from time to time she let drop, it might be gathered that she still regarded her happiness as only postponed, and the possibility of her lover's untruth as an absurdity. Oakley was heard of from time to time, often in connection with deeds of gallantry; but he was kept pretty actively employed, and so far as could be known in Veorse, was still unmarried.

Now the case, though not by any means one creditable to Oakley, was nevertheless not really so bad as it has appeared. There was another side to it, which was this. Oakley, during the cruise which led him to Teneriffe, wrote to Una telling all that he felt, and lamenting deeply that the necessities of the

service had hurried him away before his love had been revealed in words. He had his letter sealed and ready for the first chance which might offer. This chance, by evil hap, had been a privateer which had put in for some accidental cause, and which was bound for Falmouth.

The privateer never entered the Channel again, as she was captured in the Bay of Biscay by a French ship of war, which ventured to show herself out of harbour. What became of the letters which she carried nobody ever knew. Oakley did not hear of her having been taken, and he concluded, with that conviction which marks the conclusions of the very young, that the vessel reached her destined port all right.

He was chagrined and a little angry at finding no answer awaiting him in places whither he had directed such answer to be sent; but he wrote again, referring to his former letter, and setting forth his disappointment. This time again he was unfortunate. He entrusted his despatch to a vessel which foundered at sea.

The letters which he wrote to his sister, and which he despatched leisurely, waiting for an official bag, or at least a well-guarded ship, found their way home; while those which in his eagerness he sent off with special haste, might as well not have been sent at all—might better have not been sent at all, as things turned out.

When Oakley first understood from his sister that the Clowances had heard nothing of him, he calculated that long before he read her letter, they must have got his; so that facts must have answered for him. He was a young man, not much given to taking counsel with any but his own mind, and so he did not enter into any explanation with Mrs Stanshon. Later on, when she reproached him, he, believing that everything must by that time have been made quite clear, felt rather resentful of her interference, and did not reply to her remarks concerning Una.

So things went on with him, he telling himself that the Clowances neglected to answer him, and that he was the ill-used party. He did not mean to keep silence for ever, but postponed further writing until such and such a favourable occasion should happen. The chances of the service prevented these occasions from occurring at all; and, of course, with every postponement of his plans, resolve grew weaker, and it became a more awkward matter to state his case.

He was moved from ship to ship, never getting any leave of absence, and for a long while never setting foot on British soil. When at last he arrived at a home port, he would not take any step towards renewing his courtship, merely because he had

neglected his *devoir* for so long, and he didn't know how to set about it. If he were at Veorse, on the spot, as he might be in a month or two, that would be different. Things could then be said in a quarter of an hour which it would take a month's correspondence to make clear now. He waited for his visit to Veorse, and never got there till near the end of the war.

All that can be said for him was that he was very young, that he had never perhaps reflected on the grave consequences which might follow his action or neglect of action, that for long he intended and hoped to make amends for his error, and that he did not forsake Una for another love. It was rather the service, absence, and accident that made him so remiss.

In this way several years had rolled past, and the almanac showed 1812 almost run out.

Yes, undoubtedly Miss Una was a little fool, madam, or perhaps it ought to have been written mademoiselle. She ought, as you say, to have treated the wretch with the contempt which he deserved, or at the very least, to have pined herself to a shadow, instead of being the quiet, contented, hopeful being that she was. But think how much better it was for herself to be only gentle and serious, instead of declaring war against males in general, and fretting herself to a hag with spite till she resembled—well, till she had become unlovely in the extreme. Little fools are not always to be pitied for being so. Sharp-sighted people are often worse off than they.

This is the story of Una Clowance's little affair of the heart. If it will not pass for a skeleton, then the house was exceptional, and there was no skeleton in it, and everything was as simple and happy as it looked.

Now, as Doris Adair advanced toward womanhood, Una's affair dwindled in importance, and was looked upon more and more as an old story. Una herself was a consenting party to being put into a second place, and to Doris being recognised as the general pet. Doris, as they all agreed, was charming and dear, in a sense different from what the sisters recognised in speaking of each other. They had all been attractive women, Una still was so; but although they had a great pride of race, and a great respect for themselves as belonging to the race, they had always formed a modest estimate of their personal merits, and had by no means claimed to mate with the best. In regard to Doris all was different. Nothing could be too good for Doris; very few things could be good enough for her. With all this Doris was not spoiled. The aunts did not tell her all they thought, nor treat her with blind indulgence, although they were most affectionate.

Una was not too old to be a companion to Doris, and it was a great advantage to Doris that Mr Oakley had not taken Aunt Una away. That is the consolation to be derived from Una's trouble; Doris benefited by it. And it is to be feared that only in this way can we, looking through the dark glass, find any other way of explaining many sorrows. Doris benefited in this way: the elder Miss Clowances, though desiring always to do what was for Doris's good, and only wishing that they might live to see all Doris's merits fully acknowledged, were a little stern in their notions, and very strict as to a young lady's principles and deportment. The little love-stories of the family had made them suspicious, and caused them to erect walls of brass around what they treasured. One knows that they had some reason. But Una, fortunately, was not a bit chagrined or starched. She was as sweet and gentle as ever she had been; and since Doris had been with them, she had to some extent thrown off the pensive manner which had come to her after her disappointment, and would occasionally let her eyes dance merrily as of old, and indulge in a little fun. Now Doris was sensitive enough to have had her spirit too much subdued, and she was spirited enough to have been a rebel, according to the way in which the accidents of her young life might have come to her. But here Una was her example and great defence. Una was always cheerful and contented, while at the same time ready to submit herself to the wills of others. Never a murmur was heard from Una, and where Doris might have repined or been angry, Una's good temper kept her steady and bright. Doris would thus not only submit to restrictions of which she did not know the reasons, but would learn how to get some enjoyment out of the restrictions, which could often be managed if they were taken in good part.

As Doris Adair was now but barely old enough to be anybody's rival in love, it was very generally admitted, and without injurious qualification, that she was a very lovely girl. Dark chestnut hair, a good complexion, and large, fine eyes, which drooped habitually under the fringe of long lashes, were the properties which ordinary observers noted as constituting her attractions. But these beauties might have come together in a hundred ways without making up anything comparable to Doris Adair. The contour of her face, the carriage of her head, and, above all, the expression of her looks, were charming. Her figure was graceful, and so proportioned that she seemed taller than she was. Aunt Dorothy said that she would be a little taller yet.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ACCIDENT, APPARENTLY HARMLESS.

It was the end of the year 1812. Public feeling, and fireside feeling too, had become in England more hopeful than it had been for a score of years. To the generation which was arriving at manhood and womanhood, war had seemed a condition of existence; they had known nothing else. And to older people the state of war had seemed interminable. While our naval glories lasted, there had been something to gratify the national pride, and possibly a hope that the achievements of our sailors might procure an honourable peace. But the seas had been swept of enemies' fleets, there was but little left to do in that direction; yet war was maintained more vigorously than ever. The spirit who kept all the wars going seemed never to be satisfied. He had succeeded in so many expeditions, that people had despairingly anticipated success for him in every adventure that he undertook. When he invaded Russia, the speculation was, How long will the conquest of Russia occupy him? how long will it keep him quiet when he has got it? who will suffer next? must not England's turn with certainty come ere many years have passed?

When such were the thoughts and fears of the community, what a joyful rebound must have been occasioned by the news that the tide of Napoleon's affairs had turned—turned decidedly and remorselessly, it might be ruinously. He had not only failed in his seizure of Russia, but he had been overtaken by a giant destruction. The powers of Nature had warred against the ambitious nation, had destroyed its great army, and visited it with a tremendous punishment. Accounts were still slowly coming to hand of the sufferings of that awful retreat. It was felt that this was an event more promising than simply a reverse in the fortune of war. The French Emperor's sagacity had been at fault. He had committed a grievous error. His demon seemed to have forsaken him. The nations might hope again.

Besides the good news of Napoleon's failure, England had had that year three notable successes in Spain. The fortresses of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajos had been taken, and the battle of Salamanca had been won by Lord Wellington. The last had been the fruit of not only great bravery and steadiness in the troops, but of high tactical skill shown by the leader. It ac-

quired greater significance now that Napoleon was no longer regarded as infallible. Perhaps the Emperor and Lord Wellington might be pitted against each other some day. Who could say?

The story has run off the line for a little. Pardon is asked for the digression, which seemed necessary in order that conversations of the period might be recorded without the interruptions of explanatory remarks. All is right again now, and the narrative may move forward.

Miss Clowance and Miss Eleanor sat by the fire, for the day was cold, though bright.

"I suppose those two young ladies will soon be back," said Dorothy, looking at her watch.

"I don't think they'll hurry themselves," replied Eleanor.

"It is just the day for a long walk."

"I hope they won't be very late," said Dorothy again, "for I must speak to Doris before I go out, and I should go soon. It gets dark so early that one can do but little good except by beginning betimes."

"I presume from that that it is your week of the *Ladies' Association*," remarked Eleanor; "have you many visits to make?"

"Not so very many, but all want to be talked to, and one or two to be read to, and two or three hours are soon gone in that employment."

"I suppose old Fanny Trego must always have her chapter. That is no easy task."

"My dear, no indeed. She gets deafer and deafer, and bawl as I may, I can't make her hear. She is such an odd old woman! What do you think I found her doing on my last visit?"

"Something strange, I'll answer for it."

"She was on her knees on the stone floor, holding by her chair, and moving round it."

"With her old rheumatic joints?"

"With her old rheumatic joints. That was the strange part of it. She could but just have begun her circuit when I entered, and it took her quite ten minutes to work herself round to the point that she started from. The labour was terrible, and at every move she screamed and uttered an exclamation. The exclamations were made up of invocations of all the most sacred names, and interjections and groans. She would not notice me in any way till the round had been accomplished. Then she with great difficulty and howling got, exhausted, into her seat, drew a long breath, and explained to me, 'My dear, I doos that for hexercise.'"

"What an extraordinary old being!"

"Very. Will you come with me, Eleanor; or have you any occupation of your own to attend to?"

"I am going to see Berry's winter garden; I am told he has some beautiful plants there."

"Very well, then, I wish these girls had arrived."

"By the by, Dorothy, did you see that Mr Oakley has distinguished himself again?"

"Worthless man! yes. If he got his deserts—— But it is of no use talking of that. Has Una seen his name mentioned?"

"Don't know. If she has, she has said nothing. Do you know she quite believes to this moment that Oakley is true, and that he will come back and marry her?"

"Poor girl! and yet I may be wrong to pity her. She would suffer much more if she saw the matter as we do."

"Dear Mrs Stanshon cannot get over the thing. She says that whenever she meets us she feels as much ashamed as if his misconduct had been only of yesterday."

"I believe she sincerely grieves over it. We must take care of dear Doris. I am really in terror for that child, with her attractions. If she should meet a false lover too!"

"No, Dorothy, don't talk so. If you were speaking of another family, you would be the first to say that Doris at least would be safe from disappointment,—that blow after blow was not likely to fall on the same place. Recollect poor Lady Salusbury's story of the Quaker on board ship, who put his head into a shot-hole while an action was going on, because a shot was not likely to strike there again."

"Well, Eleanor, we must hope for the best."

"And the best may be very good. If only now this little promise of peace should be fulfilled, just think of the many distinguished men who will be coming back with their laurels. I am silly enough to wish I were younger, that I might suit the taste of some of these heroes. Well, these girls *are* late."

Eleanor rose and walked to the window to know if the truants were in sight. Dorothy, looking after her as she passed, thought how straight and graceful she was even in middle age, and that stranger things had happened than that a hero past his first youth might be glad to marry her. She went on with the little reverie, from which she was awaked by Eleanor exclaiming—

"Why, what is this? Here is Doris, and a strange gentleman with her, and no Una. What can it mean? And they are hurrying along."

While she spoke, Miss Clowance rose and joined her at the window. Doris and her attendant were already at the door.

The latches in Veorse had handles on the outside as well as the inside. So Doris had not to knock, but she came up the steps, signing to her escort to follow her, opened the front door, and proceeded to the room where her aunts, a little startled, were standing.

"Oh, aunt Dorothy," said Doris, rather breathless, "there's nothing, there's nothing to be alarmed at. Only you must come, you must come to aunt Una. It's really nothing. Indeed, you mustn't be frightened. But do come quick, I'm sure she isn't hurt. Indeed she said——"

Here the girl stopped for want of breath. Then the young man, who had followed her into the room, and had stood with his hat in his hand until he saw that it was necessary for him to speak, stepped forward and said—

"The other lady has been accidentally wet; that is the whole trouble. She is in safe keeping in a cottage. She will need a change of clothes and probably nothing more. She is about three miles from this."

"Whose house is your aunt in?" inquired Dorothy.

"The people are called Tucker," answered Doris. "It is the cottage with the old cross in the garden, near Olden's bridge."

"Oh, old goody Tucker, who brings the metheglin. There are beehives in the garden, are there not?" asked Eleanor.

"I don't know, aunt Eleanor."

"There *are* beehives," said the young man.

"Go and put up some clothes for Una, Eleanor, while I see if there is a chaise in at the inn. I had better go myself. We are really much obliged to you, sir, for interesting yourself in the matter."

"You don't know how much this gentleman did, aunt Dorothy. It would have been a serious accident if it had not been for Mr—Mr—oh, I don't know your name, sir."

"My name is L'Estrange. If I am allowed, I will go back with you in case I may be of any use. And as we go, we can explain everything that happened. Better not delay now."

"But you are as wet as aunt Una," said Doris to L'Estrange.

"I think I am hardly wet at all now," said he. "While you are making ready, I will run to the hotel. It happens that I have a change of clothes there, for the accidents of my work might bring me here suddenly wet and dirty."

Miss Clowance was successful in procuring the chaise. By the time it drove to the door, everything was ready to take to Una. Eleanor remained at home to see that Una's room was all ready for her with a good fire. There was a small folding-seat in the chaise, so that three might manage to travel in it

for a short distance. Miss Clowance, Doris, and L'Estrange set off, and as they journeyed came out the history of the catastrophe, which in few words was this.

Una and Doris enjoyed the bright morning much, and took a long walk—far past Olden's bridge. Soon they remembered that it was a long way back, and turned their faces homewards. As they were going down the little slope towards the bridge, they saw to their left a young man seated on a rail, with a portfolio before him, and a pencil in his hand, evidently sketching or writing. They remarked that a sharp frost was not exactly the weather they would have chosen for that work, but there was no accounting for taste. And so that subject was dismissed.

Presently they came to the bridge. Olden's bridge may be ten yards long. It is a series of piers pretty close together. There may at one time have been slabs resting on the piers to make a continuous roadway; or the knowledge of what a height the stream could on occasion rise to, and of the extreme probability that any slabs so used would be swept away, may have prevented the constructor of the bridge from attempting a footway at all. Certain it is that, on the morning in question, passengers had to step from pier to pier, which was no very difficult or nervous task. Our two damsels had got over with the greatest ease when their backs were towards home. On the way back, Una was leading. She was skipping along somewhere about the middle of the stream. There was a stone in the pier which struck up a little, and which was coated with ice. Not knowing its condition, Una trod on it, and slipped, losing her balance, and that, to a strong-headed person, would have been the end of the accident. But poor Una was frightened, and, as she said, saw the whole bridge moving—the effect of looking at the stream, which was pretty rapid. She turned giddy, made one or two false steps, and was in the water. All this happened in two seconds. Doris saw her fall, and screamed. The stream was not beyond Una's depth, but it was too strong for her, took her off her legs, and was using her roughly. Heaven knows how it might have fared with her if she had been left to such aid as Doris could render. Doris would have given all the help she could at the risk of her own life. But before she could realise the situation, more effectual help was at hand. The young man who had been at work with his pencil, was on the scene in a trice. He saw poor Una, rushed to her side, and had her steadied on her feet before any great harm had happened. Two minutes more, and she was safe on the bank.

"You must get shelter at once," said the young man. "If

you will make for that cottage, I will just fetch my portfolio, and then overtake you." In five minutes he was beside them again, and in five minutes more they were all kindly received by the dame Mrs Tucker, whose intentions were as generous as could be desired, but who was much disposed to have a little talk before proceeding to take any measure for Una's relief. She first declaimed over the plight in which the young lady appeared, then enumerated instances of wettings which had become known to her in the course of a long career, and repeated the remarks which she had thought appropriate on those occasions, and then she fell to questioning as to the accident now calling for her ministrations. The young man reminded her that every minute was of consequence, and asked if she would not make up a good fire at once. Fortunately, this was not a tedious operation. It was a large, old-fashioned chimney, with a broad stone hearth, in the middle of which a moderate fire was already burning. Half-a-dozen sticks of dry furze laid on this immediately produced a blaze of undeniable power, and a seat was placed for Una in the chimney. Then Mrs Tucker warmed some metheglin, and made Una swallow the same; and the young man, who, as it appears, was Mr l'Estrange, offered to go and let the sufferer's friends know what had befallen. Doris was charging him with a message, but Una said—

"No, Doris dear, you must go. The gentleman may be a long time finding the house; and they ought to see for themselves that you are quite safe, and that I was not in such a condition that you could not leave me. Go: you will be here again in an hour and a half. I shall be quite comfortable here."

There was a little affectionate wrangle, but finally Una's counsel prevailed. Mr l'Estrange asked if he might accompany Doris. But he too was wet. It was better that he should stay by the fire.

"Pardon me," said L'Estrange. "Nobody is likely to bring me a change of clothes, and I think a brisk walk would be the best thing for me. I don't expect to take any harm. I have been wet for days together."

The last assertion would have excited curiosity and inquiry under other circumstances; but as things were, action was the thing to decide on. A few more words, and Doris started under L'Estrange's escort, to arrive safely as we have seen.

CHAPTER V.

MISCHIEVOUS RESULTS.

Una was hardly inclined to talk : the departure, therefore, of the other two visitors rather checked Mrs Tucker's conversation. This was not unfortunate, for the good lady grew more thoughtful when she lost her hearers.

"Law, now, miss," said she, "I think, arter all, you would be better if your things was off altogether, and you in bed. There's a nice well-aired bed in the small chamber there, and I'll have clean sheets on in three minutes, and make a fire."

"Oh, don't trouble yourself," said Una. "I do very well here."

"But it ain't no trouble ; and I will, if you please. I'm sure that's the best way to keep off chills."

And thereupon Mrs Tucker carried away from the hearth a large quantity of wood-coals in a firepan, deposited the same on the hearth of the other room, added fresh fuel, and speedily had a scorching blaze in operation there. She put on the sheets, applied a warming-pan, took Una in, and assisted her to throw off her wet clothes. A dry and very clean-looking night-dress was produced, and speedily Una was in bed and comfortable, and feeling as well as she had done before she fell in.

It must not be supposed, however, that while Mrs Tucker was thus caring for Una she was absolutely silent, or that she spoke only of the business in hand. While actively engaged, she could not, of course, be as communicative as when standing at ease with her hands resting on her hips ; but for all that, she did not deny herself such refreshment in the way of discoursing as was compatible with the attentions which she was offering. It was the opinion of many of her acquaintances that Mrs Tucker was more entertaining in her intermittent mode, when her speech distilled as the dew, than when her floodgates were wide open and her eloquence a continuous stream.

"I reckon," said she, "I can't quite mind the first time I was wet to the skin. You couldn't neither, if 'twas you ; for I wasn't much over two year old. But I got out somehow from the place where it was thought I could play in safety while mother was busy, and poor mother, looking in to see that all was right, screamed out, 'Lord, where's the cheeld ?' Two or three neighbours run'd in and looked about ; but they wouldn't have had the gumption in their fright to do anything sensible,

if a coarse, rude creatur, that nobody liked, hadn't come in and said, 'What's the use o' standing here a-groanin' and screamin'? Sarch the dengerous places fust,' says she, 'and if it isn't there, you may take your time a-sarching the places that bean't dengerous.' And she made 'em move, she did. So they went to the well, and that was safe and tight, with the lid down. Then they went across to the wheeler's yard, and there the large dog was pleasant and peaceable; there warn't no edge tools nor oil nor paint a-lying about, and Mr Tyer hisself was a-taking of his half-pint, as often he did mornings and afternoons, and he hadn't a-seen no cheeld, nor the sign of one. 'I reckon,' says Mr Tyer, 'she's a-gone up-stairs and got under the bed,' as if a little mite not two year old could ha' climbed a steep stair and gone under the bed. 'Don't lose no time,' says the coarse woman; 'there's a nasty place behind your garden-hedge where Mr Stringer was beginning of a ditch and didn't go on. I reckon there's water there,' says she, 'arter all the rains.' And so round the garden-hedge they all hastened, where there was water sure enough, but all looked still. They was thinking where to go next, when mother, she shrieked out, 'Lor, if that don't look like a little hand a-sticking up over at the far end!' One said, 'It is,' and another, 'It isn't,' but while they was a argufying, the coarse woman she jumps into the ditch just as she was, and waded across. 'Here's your cheeld, Mrs Stone,' she calls out; 'but I'm afeard we be too late.'"

"Of coorse it wasn't too late," continued Mrs Tucker, after Una had expressed herself sufficiently pleased with the story. "It couldn't ha' been too late, or I shouldn't ha' been an ould 'ooman attending upon you this day. But they must ha' begunned the sarch just in the wrong direction, and while they was at the wheeler's I must ha' reached the trench and falled in. That day, and for long arter, till she made herself so disagreeable again that nobody could abide her, the coarse woman was a popilar person all through the village, and might ha' had what she would of any of the wives. I owe her my life, I do; and I always think of her when I've got the cough, for I caught a bad cowl'd then, and I've been liable ever since; and whenever my chest begins to be painful I say, 'This reminds me of Jane Coulter, and how she got me out of the trench.' It's more than threescore year agone."

"That Mrs Coulter seems to have been a ready person both with her wits and in her actions," observed Una.

"She wasn't nobody's missus," answered Mrs Tucker, "and she didn't seem to want to be nobody's missus. There was a story as how she'd a been crossed in love in another parish, and

that made her rude and contrairy. But I ask your pardon, miss."

Una turned round with quite a genuine look of inquiry to find out what Mrs Tucker's apology meant. She did not consider herself a forsaken damsel, and could quite bear to hear about "crosses." Yet her romance had reached Mrs Tucker's ears, and peradventure drawn a tear from that kind old woman. The dame, blushing for her imprudence, was now clumsily making her retreat under cover of another story. She was by this time standing beside the bed in which Una was comfortably lying.

"My dear," continued Mrs Tucker, a little confusedly at first, "talking of wettings brings to mind a great trouble that I've had for many a year, and it's only lately that I've found the least bit of comfort. The worst kind of wetting you can have is when you falls overboard from your ship and is drowned. Now, I've got a son,—a wild one; the others was all dootiful,—and nothing would satisfy him, for all that his father and me could say, but he must go to sea. Many's the quarrel we had about it, but in the end Mr Owdacious went. Knowing that he is disobedient, I'm always a-fearing the judgment 'll come upon him; and so from the time that the first letter was received, saying that he was really aboard and going to foreign parts, I tried in all directions, examining offers in the newspapers, and taking of every step likely for to procure the proper charm to send him that he might wear it round his neck."

"A charm, Mrs Tucker?"

"Yes, my dear, a proper safeguard, wearing of which no one can ever be drowned. Fourteen and sixpence I had to pay; not a farthing less would they take. And the last time he was home—'tis six months ago now—I gave him the charm, and I can safely say that was the first time I ever saw him go without feeling that he never might come back again."

"But what is this wonderful protection? I should so like to know." Una thought that possibly she might, some day or other, be glad to endow a sailor in this way.

"Well, I thought everybody knew. It's a child's——"

Mrs Tucker's discourse was broken off by the stopping of a chaise at her door.

"It will be my sisters," exclaimed Una. "They have brought a chaise for me."

If Miss Clowance entered with an anxious feeling as to the state in which she might find her sister, she was speedily reassured by the sight which presented itself to her in Mrs Tucker's inner chamber. There lay the Republic as placid as

if nothing particular had happened, her fresh colour just as usual, and a soft pink overspreading her soft, smooth skin. Her hair, which had just the least thing broken loose, had arranged itself very becomingly on the pillow about her face. The whole effect was as of a nymph reposing luxuriously, far from care of any sort.

"My dear!" exclaimed Miss Clowance, going to the bed and kissing Una.

"I haven't taken the least harm, sister. How quick you have been! but I might have been sure that you would lose no time. Has sister Eleanor come? I hope she isn't frightened."

Doris and Mrs Tucker now brought in the case containing Una's clothes. It had been brought from the chaise by Mr l'Estrange, who waited by Mrs Tucker's fire to hear in what condition the patient had been found. It was Doris Adair who came to tell him that Una reported herself, and appeared to be, perfectly well. And then Doris and the young man talked for a while by the hearth. He had been greatly struck with Doris on first seeing her, had observed her whenever he got a favourable opportunity, during both the walk to Veorse and their drive out, and had come to the decision that he had never in his life seen so charming a girl. Nothing wonderful in this either, if he was, as he seemed, a youth of the country-side; for one might traverse a large tract of the Furze Range district without meeting any one so bewitching as Doris Adair. But then L'Estrange, young as he was, did not belong to that country-side, and he had had opportunities of seeing fair girls elsewhere, even in lands where beauty "hath oft been matchless deemed." Nevertheless, despite his experience, he had thought Doris the nonpareil of women. And now, when all anxiety concerning Una had been relieved, and Doris could be seen in comparative repose, she appeared to him more lovely than ever, her speech and manner were so unaffected, and at the same time so modest and maidenly.

Doris, as they walked to Veorse after the accident, had never thought of inquiring of the young L'Estrange anything about himself, but she had told him a little about herself and her connections. While they were talking now, and her mind was at ease about aunt Una, it somehow occurred to her that she had no right to reckon upon any future conversation of this kind. The young man was evidently a stranger in the neighbourhood, and had probably a home elsewhere. She would have liked to know something concerning the duration of his stay, but felt an objection to asking a question in that regard. The conversation was brisk enough; but it was principally upon general

subjects, about likings and dislikings, and accidents, and protection against cold—the last subject being introduced by Doris, who could not understand how anybody could write or sketch in the open air in winter. L'Estrange showed her that the thing was quite possible, and told her that he did both on every day when it did not either rain hard or snow heavily. And this new theme engaged them until aunt Dorothy came out from the bed-chamber, and announced that Una would be ready in a few minutes.

"You will come back with us, will you not, Mr L'Estrange?" said Dorothy.

"I am afraid not, Miss Clowance. My work lies just now nearer to Mathwick than to Veorse, so I had better sleep at Mathwick. I expect to be in Veorse before many days have passed, and when I go there I hope I may be allowed to call and inquire after you, especially after the young lady who has been so unlucky to-day?"

"Rather, who has been so lucky in being quickly delivered from a perilous situation. Certainly we shall be much disappointed if you do not come to see us. We shall have the greatest pleasure in receiving you. If you are free to make an engagement, and will name any evening soon that you can spend with us, we will introduce you to some of our friends. Most people in Veorse will know by this time of the service you have rendered to my sister, and our little circle of friends will be glad to welcome you."

No proposal could have been, at that moment, more acceptable to the young man. "I sleep at Mathwick at present," answered he, "because that town is nearer to my work for a few days. But it will quite suit me to move soon to Veorse. Will Thursday evening next be a convenient evening? Thank you. Then on that evening I hope to make my appearance in your drawing-room."

"Do you intend to remain long in this neighbourhood?"

"I think not very long. My business here is connected with an extensive survey that is in progress. We shift our quarters as our work advances. I was busy in sketching some ground this morning when the accident occurred."

Now entered the Republic in a changed dress, but looking as tranquil and sweet as if nothing had gone wrong with her since the morning. Una smiled on her deliverer, and in answer to his inquiries, said that she felt not at all the worse for her wetting. "But," added she, "I was immediately well-cared for. You remained long in your wet clothes. Is it not likely that you have taken cold?"

"I don't think so. I have often remained longer in wet clothes, and in worse circumstances. I see all is ready now: shall I put you into your carriage?"

"You are not coming with us?"

"Mr l'Estrange," said Dorothy, "is going to Mathwick, but we shall have the pleasure of seeing him on Thursday."

Then there was a little consultation as to how Dame Tucker's kindness should be acknowledged. Dorothy was of opinion that she would be offended by the offer of money, and so it was decided that some other means of marking their gratitude should be adopted. They all thanked her heartily in bidding adieu, the three ladies were packed in their carriage, and with many smiles and bows from them, and from those from whom they parted, they drove off.

L'Estrange and Mrs Tucker looked after the vehicle till it reached the first bend in the road. After that the old lady turned, and said with a little nod, "There's many a young feller that would be glad to have arned a smile from her."

"Ah, yes!" answered L'Estrange; "from which?"

"Well, I meaned from Miss Una, the one that falled in; but you be a-thinking most, perhaps, about the niece. Well, she's a sweet maid, too. One's as handsome as t'other, and both beauties."

"Are they of good family?"

"The best, the very best. Rich they be not; and there's many that says they've had very hard luck about fortin; but luck can't take blood away, and they've got good blood."

"I wonder they are still single."

"Well, as for the young miss, she couldn't well be otherwise than single. Time enough for her. But for Miss Una, bless you, she might ha' married any time this five year, only she don't choose. She ha' had a disappointment." The last words with a nod and a meaning look.

"A disappointment! I never saw anybody less like a disappointed person."

"Well, she do look sweet and contented; but she don't encourage mankind for all that. Perhaps she's like them the preacher was a-telling of last Sunday. She don't appear to men to be distressed, and she isn't of a sad countenance. But she may be very faithful to an old love in her heart for all that."

"Then why do you think me lucky in getting a smile from her?"

"Well, she don't look as if she would mourn for ever, do

she? And 'twould be a feather in a man's cap to comfort a little heart like that."

Mrs Tucker would have continued the conversation indefinitely, but L'Estrange had business to attend to, and took his leave of her.

CHAPTER VI.

MARS INCOGNITO.

"The young man is a surveyor, or something of that sort, just now working for the Government, and employed in this neighbourhood;" that was the account given by the Clowance ladies in inviting a few friends to spend the evening with them, and meet L'Estrange. It was evidently considered that the young man was hardly in a position to claim such attention as the ladies intended to show him, but that, in acknowledgment of the service which he had rendered to Miss Una, it was hoped that all her friends would accord to him a kind reception.

On the Thursday evening, a chatty, friendly little party was assembling in Miss Clowance's drawing-room, where a good fire as well as a warm welcome awaited them. Guests, as they came in, went towards the genial glow, and were cheered by it, for the weather was still cold and frosty. Mrs Percival Clowance had become very liable to take cold, and as already she had had an acute attack that winter, she was ensconced in the warmest corner of the room, wrapped up to the chin, and excused from exertion of every kind; her sisters-in-law could not bear to think that she should be at home, dull and suffering, while they were all doing their best to be merry. Her husband was present, in the best of health and spirits. Mrs Burridge, a stout, cheerful matron, known to be discreet in a sick-room, was seated near Mrs Percival, to whom she talked, and whom she desired to make no return communication, except so far as she could do so without irritating her throat. One or two more matrons were dispersed around the hearth, and a few young ladies had been collected. Of course, where there were young ladies, young gentlemen were also bidden, and there was a goodly sprinkling,—a surgeon's apprentice, two young men from the bank, a clergyman who had just taken orders, and a university man, intended for the Church, but who did not seem in any hurry about taking his degree. There was likewise a

Mr Millis, who hoped to be called to the bar some day, but who was then studying with an attorney (the term was not resented at that period) in Veorsa. Some seniors willing to cut in at whist, play cribbage, or otherwise assist in passing the evening agreeably, made up the party.

Dorothy and Eleanor, in handsome dresses, received and entertained their guests. Dorothy, who was exceedingly candid in her attire, wore a turban, the bows and other ornaments of which were mixed with locks which were now becoming a little silvery. Eleanor, maintaining a stout fight with time, was straight, slim, and graceful, not too youthfully dressed, and wore a light cap on her head—"a handsome woman, sir; by George, a handsome woman still. I remember her a beauty," as old Mr Pridham remarked to Mr Andrews, as they took snuff together. The Republic and Doris, more like sisters than like aunt and niece, very nicely dressed, and very bright, were seeing to the comfort and inquiring after the health of the younger ladies as they arrived. The demoiselles were in red, yellow, and blue slippers, their dresses two or three inches off the carpet, so that when they sat a tidy proportion of their understandings was visible. They had sashes about their waists, tied in large bows behind, and their necks and shoulders and their arms, save an inch or two at the top, were quite bare.

The tea was to be made in another room. The duty of making it on such occasions usually fell to Una and Doris conjointly; but, as to-night the chief interest centred in Una and her accident, it was thought meet that she should be present all through the reception of the guests, and thus Doris, unsupported, was tea-maker. Thus also Doris was not in the drawing-room when Mr l'Estrange was announced.

That gentleman, on his entrance, did not appear to be in the least overcome by the sight of the distinguished party. Without the slightest embarrassment, he came forward and paid his compliments to the sisters, and was introduced to their brother and his wife, and to all the little circle, most of those present having something complimentary to say about the service he had rendered to Una. During presentations he could not help looking about for the person whom he had expected to be the first attraction of the evening; and as soon as they were over, he lost no time in expressing his hope that Miss Adair was quite well. Of course there was a satisfactory report of Miss Adair. Miss Adair knew in some way that Mr l'Estrange had arrived; and she found the tea-room very irksome, and thought she had never in her life known people to drink so many cups.

Meanwhile the younger gentlemen, who had resolved to be

very condescending to the surveyor, were conscious of some shyness when they saw that he was tolerably at his ease among them. An exception should, however, be made of Mr Millis, the law reader, whose besetting sin was certainly not shyness. He was, altogether, not an ill-natured little man, but he liked to appear to be of consequence, and was sometimes rather meddlesome and argumentative. His pretended familiarity with matters which do not generally much interest young men who are just getting beards, in the country, made him pass for well-informed, and rendered him a little conceited. His nose turned up slightly, and he carried his head so that the chin was well forward,—one might call it an intrusive countenance,—and it rested upon a short thick neck, the muscles of which being not very pliant, Mr Millis favoured them, and moved his eyes a great deal instead. He approached L'Estrange as soon as the latter had made his bows to the ladies, saying—

"You must have found it rather cold to-day, if you have been in the open air. Ten degrees of frost last night."

"I have been in the air the greater part of the day, and I found it cold."

"I should think so. You are surveying about here, are you not?"

"My work here is connected with a large Government survey; but that is, of course, directed by more important persons. I can hardly call myself a surveyor."

"I have no doubt that you contribute very usefully to the work. I hear that you are at work in all weathers. Shall you make a long stay in the neighbourhood?"

"Veorse is a centre from which a good deal of country may be reached. I should think it might be my abode for six weeks or two months."

"I asked thinking that it might be convenient to you to join some of our little amusements. We have a whist club. You play whist? I thought so. And some of us agree to be 'at home' in turn every Friday night. I shall be at home to-morrow. You will oblige me if you will join our little party. Drawing-room floor at Spicey the grocer's. People at the inn will show you where it is."

L'Estrange accepted; and then Mr Millis went on, "We want good maps very much. I have reason constantly to condemn the inaccuracy of our local surveys. The trigonometrical system must, as any one can see, be much better."

"In what respects do you consider the trigonometrical method to be superior?"

"Well, I thought everybody—why, of course—why, I thought

the thing didn't admit of a doubt; I can't say exactly why it's better, but it's generally admitted to be so."

"I can't say either," said L'Estrange quietly, "for I have nothing to do with the trigonometrical work, and don't understand it. My business is sketching and shading the features of the ground."

Mr Millis perceived that he had been betrayed into an exposure of his ignorance, and that the surveyor had taken what he called "a rise out of him." He generally, by dint of assurance, managed to establish his opinion. He was ruffled now, and said—

"Pleasant work enough in summer, but I should think awful drudgery at this season. Besides, the Government pay everybody—that is, everybody who really works—so badly, that a man must be hard put to it before he would take to such a business."

"Just so," answered L'Estrange, laughing, "I can't think it's worth any one's while; but you see there are men found willing to do it."

Mr Millis was more uncomfortable. L'Estrange had said nothing uncivil; but he had certainly not confessed to any superiority of Mr Millis, who accordingly waxed snappish, and might possibly have said something disagreeable but for an interruption which came about as follows:—

Perhaps Doris had unwillingly revealed to another more than she had confessed to her own heart, else it is difficult to account for the quickness of that quiet little Una, who certainly had an object in what she now did. Perceiving that the guests had all arrived, Una thought she might go in and take her share of the tea-making, and she chose that Mr l'Estrange should escort her. Thus it was she who, coming up to where Millis and he were conversing, interrupted their dialogue.

"Mr l'Estrange," said Una, "I am going to help Miss Adair in the tea-room. I have reason to feel some confidence in your escort. Will you lead me in?"

L'Estrange bowed and offered his arm, while Mr Millis smoothed his ruffled feathers, and went back to the other young men,—smoothed his feathers, because it would never have answered to let others see that Mr Millis had got the worst of an encounter of any kind.

"Well, not a bad fellow considering. A little too much assurance; but that probably is from inexperience. I daresay we shall like him very well. I have asked him to the 'at home' to-morrow, and he has accepted." This was the report that Mr Millis gave to his fellows.

While they were discussing the new-comer, he, the subject of their remarks, was for the time oblivious of their existence, so much was he engrossed by the company to which he migrated.

"I thought I might come and relieve you now, Doris dear; and as you have not given your welcome to Mr l'Estrange, I have brought him to receive it."

The little impatience which had been trying Miss Adair had had the effect of just heightening her colour, and giving increased brilliancy to her eyes. She was standing at the tea-table with a small silk apron tied round her to protect her dress from the stains of tea or coffee. Her attitude was eminently graceful, as L'Estrange had time to remark; and when, with a look of undisguised pleasure, she offered her hand and bade him welcome, he was entirely absorbed in admiration and delight. There was an appreciable period of silence, which nobody thought embarrassing, but the necessity of breaking which was apparent. And so L'Estrange began asking about Doris's health and her fright, on which points her appearance had already reassured him, and silly Doris asked whether he had come to stay in Veorse, and said she was "so glad," the little simpleton.

However, if Doris's wish was (as one may suspect it was) to stand well in Mr l'Estrange's opinion, there was not the slightest necessity for using reserve or any other precaution to attain her end. L'Estrange was pretty well dazzled by her beauty, and had not much power of criticising her words or deeds; in fact, every look and expression of hers seemed to him to be not only most fitting, but most charming. Fortunately, Una took charge of the urns, and supplied the waiters with refreshments, or it is to be feared that some of the intemperate tea-drinkers might have complained of scant entertainment. Upon second thoughts, it is better to witness no more of this unedifying scene. Anybody can imagine two young people falling in love, and can fill in, for himself, the highly instructive conversation which took place between them.

We leave them and return to the drawing-room, where, a little later, the party is all together again. The Reverend Percival Clowance and a constant antagonist of his are in a remote corner, deep in chess. An elderly couple, a lady and gentleman, have sat down to cribbage. A group of guests, who like conversation better than anything else, has ranged itself round Mrs Percival's corner, and takes its recreation in a low tone out of respect to the whist-table, at which four very earnest players have surrendered themselves to the fascinating rubber, Miss Clowance among them. And then there is the round game, at which all the young people, and some not over young,

are enjoying themselves vastly. L'Estrange, whether through accident or design it cannot be stated, was not sitting next Doris, but nearly opposite by Una, where he could observe Doris's pretty movements and looks. An elderly beau is making himself very agreeable to Eleanor, who is playing; the young lady guests have got the other swains dealt out pretty evenly among them; and Mr Millis, a sort of master of the ceremonies, is desiring every inattentive person to mind the game, awarding penalties, disallowing advantages which ladies may have obtained unfairly through the politeness of gentlemen, and explaining the very subtle laws which ought to govern this abstruse game; but he is, like Wisdom, crying in the streets, for no one regardeth him. They are very irregular, very noisy, and very merry.

So far as can be remembered, there is nothing particular to record of this part of the evening, which was by no means the evening's end; for tea had been taken at an early hour, and there was plenty of time on this side of midnight for varying the methods of enjoyment.

The round-table party in time grew tired of their game, and one of the gentlemen proposed that they should have a pool of "Fright." His idea found ready acceptance. The few persons who were "sitting out" conversing were called upon to join in the lottery; they cast their gifts into the plate, and all hands prepared for the excitement of being drawn out of the game one after another, until one lucky person should be left the possessor of the whole pool. It was at this conjuncture that the portly Mrs Preston, who had not yet sorted her hand, rose from the whist-table, and advanced solemnly to the "Fright" party.

"Do not," said she, "do not shriek, I implore you; for we are in the very agonies of the game."

The whist-players had borne much already from the noisy juveniles; and now the mention of "Fright" (which is so certainly productive of screams from the unhappy persons who draw the fatal cards, that it is often denominated "Screech" or "Shriek") was too much for their equanimity. Both sides were at eight. This deal was pretty sure to be decisive, or, if not, the next certainly would. The tension of worthily maintaining the fight amid such circumstances was sufficiently trying for human nerves; but if nerves so strained were to be further tortured by sudden shrieks, what mortal could be equal to the requirements of the game? So sacred was whist held to be in those days, and so weak were young people of the period in attending to the wishes of their elders, that the claim

of the *square* party was immediately admitted, and it was promised that every shriek should be commuted for a groan so low that its anguish should not be perceptible a yard beyond the circumference of the round-table.

"Miss Eleanor, name the first card."

"I don't know what to name. Let somebody else say what it shall be."

"No, you say. Any card will do."

"Oh, I'm sure I—well, the king of hearts."

"That will do. Now then——"

And the drawing and the tremors began. "No shrieking now, only a low groan," cautions Mr Millis. L'Estrange is impressed with the self-evident truth, that the eternal fitness of things requires that Miss Adair shall not draw the killing king of hearts. To prevent such catastrophe, he is drawing out of his turn, and taking two or three cards where he ought to take but one, hoping to bring the penalty on himself; but Mr Millis detects his unprincipled device, and declares that the whole merit of the game consists in its being impartial. He cancels the proceedings, says they must begin again, and with ruthless hands puts all the pack on their faces, and stirs them about until the confusion is confounded to such a degree that the king of hearts is spirited to the confines of chance, and awaits his reappearance as mysteriously as King Arthur.

Mr L'Estrange's fraudulent conduct has been clearly for the benefit of everybody but himself. Everybody had, therefore, a right to appropriate the goodwill and the intended benefit. And yet, somehow, the infatuated Doris imagines that Mr L'Estrange was sacrificing his own chances for her alone, and blushes, and is more confused than the criminal himself during his exposure and denunciation by Mr Millis. Some of the young ladies, strange to say, were quick at discerning Miss Adair's display of consciousness, and looked at each other and at the young gentlemen, as if calling on all present to note a fact concerning which they might hereafter be called upon to testify solemnly. The delay in proceeding with the game was amply atoned for by the number of jokes and clever sayings which grew out of it, and they played out their play most merrily, not concluding till after the whist-players had risen; so that when the competitors for the pool were reduced to two in number, the loser (she was a lady) was allowed to utter a wail, which might include the unspoken griefs of all previous losers as well as of herself.

That last had been a desperately hard-fought rubber. The

opponents were each side at eight when the scores were last noted. Honours were subsequently divided for two deals; only the trick was gained, and that by first one pair then the other, so that they stood at nine all. Then came that momentous deal which, as everybody knew, must end the contest. Miss Clowance, by finessing her ten of spades, just gained it; for the victors had barely one trick to show, and, as everybody admitted, it had been a marvellously near thing. An immense deal of amusement had been got out of the conflict. Our modern game is to the old "long" as a railway to a stage-coach. We, in pride of pace, pity the slow-goers of old; but very few of the slow-goers, though they lived to witness fast things, could reconcile themselves to the fifty miles an hour, or to the "five-up."

But cards and conversation are superseded by a new interest. There is a substantial supper to be discussed, and the company files off to the dining-room, where the fragrance of game, sausages, meat-pies, pigeon-pies, and a variety of other attractive dishes, tells of the good entertainment that awaits them. Miss Clowance and Miss Eleanor sat at the ends of the table in state. A substantial elder of Veorse supported the lady at the head; but L'Estrange, as the guest of the evening, was squire to Miss Eleanor, and had to show his talent in carving a hare, an office which seemed to be not so very strange to him.

The early moments of the meal were occupied in ascertaining what ladies would condescend to eat of, and in the issue of protests by the younger ladies, such as, "Oh dear, that's too much." "Cut it in half, please." "Will you send that plate to somebody else, and give me the tiniest bit?" The said protests, it is believed, were very little attended to, and as far as the general result can be ascertained, everybody made a very good supper, and the conversation waxed merry and loud in proportion as appetite was appeased. Beer and cider were taken by the gentlemen at supper, and wine and water were mixed for the ladies; but after the supper had been discussed and the cloth was removed, and when the mahogany was allowed to show its shining face, then came the season for liquid refreshment. The company arranged itself so as to throw open the fire, which, being now trimmed, sent out a genial blaze. There were mixings of beverages of all strengths, from the six-water negus of a primrose or an amethyst colour, which, as some of the ladies protested, was more than they could bear, to the extremely high-coloured mixtures which some few of the company (not all males) imbibed with satisfaction. Songs were demanded. Two or three ladies, after much pressing, sang without accompani-

ments, unless a few soft tenor notes contributed by Mr Millis, to support the voices, as he said, could be so called. Millis, who had a good, though uncultivated voice, then gave a sentimental ballad, very popular at the time; the young parson did likewise, and by that time some of the young gentlemen found themselves in courage to perform a selection of their inimitable comic songs.

"I never heard anybody sing that song of 'Treble X' so humorously as you do, Mr Jarry, since the old company of players used to come every year to Mathwick. There was a one-eyed comedian who used to give it just as you do. His name was Prout. I can see him now," observed Mrs Preston.

"I remember him," said old Mr Burridge, setting down his tumbler on the mantelpiece, close to which he was seated. "He used to tell the other men of the company that he could use his one eye to more purpose than any of them could use his pair; and I believe he did. A shrewd fellow."

"Left them in consequence of having secretly married the manager's daughter. Manager's wife couldn't be reconciled to a son-in-law with one eye, although she didn't dislike Prout. Ah, that's a long time ago," said Mr Andrews.

"There was a man named Bennet after that who used to sing sea-songs. Ah, I liked to hear all those about storms and battles; and that man sang them so well," said Miss Eleanor Clowance.

"The songs are as good as ever, Miss Eleanor," returned Mr Andrews, "only our sailors have done their work so effectually that we are no longer kept in a fever about naval actions."

"Yes, it's the land service that is taking its turn now," said Eleanor again.

"It is, Eleanor," said Percival Clowance. "And it's my opinion that we don't think enough of what our soldiers have been doing. The operations of the French armies in other parts of Europe have been so vast, that, because our achievements in Spain are on a smaller scale, we don't see the brilliancy of them. What do you think, Mr l'Estrange?" The last sentence kindly intended to bring into the conversation the young surveyor, who had been rather silent of late.

"I think," answered L'Estrange, "that, though doubtless the country does full justice to the exploits of the troops, it doesn't yet know what a general it has got in Spain. His great abilities are coming more and more strongly out every day. Those who know him best only wish the day may come when he may measure his strength against that of the Emperor."

An expression of dissent here from Mr Millis—not a particu-

larly courteous expression. Mr Millis used to read up despatches and such accounts of military proceedings as were in that day procurable; and, on the strength of his acquaintance with names and dates, used to lay down the law in Veorse concerning our campaigns. He was, moreover, a strong opponent of the Ministry then in power. Thus L'Estrange had offended doubly: first, in presuming to give an opinion as to matters in which Mr Millis's authority was paramount; and secondly, in giving credit to Lord Wellington, who had been guilty of the sin of falsifying the predictions of the Opposition.

Mr Millis's neck grew very stiff, and his chin protruded threateningly, as he took up his parable and said—

"We may be thankful that they haven't encountered each other already. If they had, perhaps we might not glory quite so much as we do."

But L'Estrange did not intend to be set down just yet, and he answered—

"So far as these things are matter of opinion, of course everybody has a right to think as he pleases. But this point of Lord Wellington's very great ability is attested by so many important and incontrovertible facts, that it must speedily overcome contradiction."

This remark seemed pleasing to the company. There was a murmur of assent, and there were nods and smiles, indicating that the supremacy of Mr Millis was a tyranny, and that a champion of the other side was welcome. But these signs of approval were not soothing to Mr Millis.

"His great ability," retorted the little lawyer, "lies principally in his aristocratic connection. Our soldiers have done bravely, of course I don't mean to deny that. They always do, under any leader. But that there has been any great merit in the general, I take leave to doubt. The soldiers won him Salamanca last June."

"You surely do not imagine," replied L'Estrange, "that all the bravery in the world could have won the field of Salamanca last summer, if the General had not seized his opportunity with supreme skill, understood where to strike his decisive blow, and had his troops so well in hand that he could deliver it when he pleased?"

"I imagine," said Millis, "that the French army were exceedingly unfortunate. Their leader was struck down—which may be anybody's luck, remember—quite early in the day, before he had put his battle in order; there was a confusion consequent upon the change of commanders, during which our fellows pressed them hard, as, I admit, they always will do."

"I understand the affair quite differently," L'Estrange answered. "The French leader was unhurt quite long enough to make the mistake by which Lord Wellington profited, and which was really the cause of the battle and of our victory. Marmont, though he intended to fight, was for out-manceuvring us first, in his eagerness to do which he separated one of his divisions too much from the others. Wellington detected the blot at a glance, forced his troops between the disjointed divisions, and nearly annihilated that which had gone so far from support. That did not end the conflict, and no doubt the bravery of the troops completed what had been so well begun. But the success was, in the first instance, due to the blow having been delivered unhesitatingly at the right moment."

"Ah!" said Mr Millis, "I see you have given some thought to the subject, which of course is much to your credit. But I think, if ever you go deeper into it, you will see things differently, and learn that these praises of the General are invented and circulated only to deceive the public and gain an undeserved popularity for a worthless Administration."

"I have no more to say," said L'Estrange quietly; "but I adhere to my own opinion;" and he turned and addressed a remark to a lady near him, in order that an end might be put to the discussion, which was disagreeably engrossing the whole table.

Una smiled and looked at Doris when L'Estrange began to talk. Doris was evidently pleased that her admirer took up the argument against the despotic Mr Millis, and that he maintained it so ably as he did; but her eyes grew very bright, and her nostrils dilated, when Mr Millis spoke so impertinently and got the last word. However, there was no more disputing, but another song or two, then a move towards dispersion, which was vigorously and at first successfully resisted by the hostesses, but which had to be renewed after a very short interval, and was now supported by the whole party, who rose from table and commenced the inevitable leave-taking. Amid the wrappings in the hall, Mr Millis took occasion to say, in what he intended to be a gracious manner, to L'Estrange, that he must not forget his engagement for to-morrow evening, and L'Estrange, laughing, answered, "Never fear, I will not forget;" which, as Mr Millis thought, was not the style in which a person in L'Estrange's condition should have recognised an engagement to *him*.

It had been a pretty long evening, and yet the last guest had departed before midnight, so early did entertainments begin in those days. Miss Clowance and Eleanor were moving about,

putting decanters and spirit-stands into cellarets and cupboards. But Doris and Una stood by the fire in the dining-room, rather desiring to speak out their sentiments about some of the occurrences of the evening.

"If ever," said Doris, "there was a conceited, impertinent little man, it is that Mr Millis. To think of his speaking to Mr l'Estrange in that tone of superiority ! He is perfectly odious."

"It is the fault of the young men here, who let Mr Millis have his own way too much," answered Una. "He is not ill-natured, but they have spoiled him."

"A jackanapes," said Doris ; "I would teach him to behave himself, if I were a man."

CHAPTER VII

MARS AND CUPID.

Breakfast in Miss Clowance's house was only a little later than usual next morning. The ladies did not allow that the routine of the day should be disturbed because there had been "a little friendly party" the evening before. Nevertheless, there was a good deal to do before the traces of the party could be quite effaced, and Una and Doris were locking away the best china, and sorting the plate, and putting counters into their places, till nearly eleven o'clock. While these things were being done, Dorothy and Eleanor sat by the drawing-room fire talking over the party.

"Do you know, Dorothy," said Eleanor, after they had passed dresses in review, and decided that if Mr Burridge went on increasing his consumption of snuff, he would have to take out two or three boxes full, for one could never last him through an evening—"do you know they had some joke at the round-table about Mr l'Estrange and Doris ?"

"Nonsense, Eleanor."

"Well, but there must be something, you know, Dorothy ; and I've asked Una, and Una says she thinks they've taken a fancy to each other."

"Fancy ! yes, they may have taken a fancy. We all do take many fancies in our lives. But I think this is a fancy about which we need not be much troubled. Mr l'Estrange, though an agreeable young man, is not exactly Doris's equal, you know ;

and he is not going to be long in this neighbourhood, and will probably go away in a week or two, and never be heard of here again."

"Well, perhaps so. I don't wonder at his admiring Doris. I quite dread the coming of lovers about her. If that miserable old baronet had not behaved so dishonourably, Doris's fortune would have been equal to her beauty, and we should only have had to choose among suitors. I was dreaming of Traseaden Hall last night—that we were all going there for a visit. I wonder if the dream meant anything?"

"I don't know. It is a cruel thing to have been so tricked out of our own. But it was not poor Sir Wolsey; it was that villain who is there now, and who will never prosper, take my word for it. But about this Mr l'Estrange; I daresay he may have struck Doris's fancy owing to the circumstances in which they met each other. Better to take no notice, and the child will forget all about him before three months are over."

Now it happened that Mrs Stanshon, who, as will be remembered, was the sister of Lieutenant Oakley, and the wife of a military officer who was abroad with his regiment, returned only the evening before from a visit which she had been paying at a town named Cookwort, not very distant from Veorse. She came to see the Miss Clowances this day, and to say how sorry she had been that she could not return in time for their party. "I hear, my dears, that it was charming," she said; "and you had Mr l'Estrange here. Is he not agreeable? and so modest too? And they tell me the supper was perfection, and everything kept up with such spirit. And, oh, what a joke it was, that little whipper-snapper, Mr Millis, pretending to argue with *him* about the battle of Salamanca!"

Doris and Una were now in the room, and at mention of the argument were instantly on the *qui vive*, and looked at each other.

"Oh, they disputed a little, as young men will," said Dorothy. "I wish Mr Millis had been a little less *brusque*; but, you know, he *does* inform himself about these military events, and I suppose he didn't like any one else to appear as well acquainted with such matters as himself."

"Acquainted as himself!" echoed Mrs Stanshon. "Well, that is the best idea,—ha, ha, ha!—oh, only fancy, ha, ha! Excuse my being so amused, Miss Clowance; but the impertinence of that little being surpasses anything. Acquainted as himself indeed!"

"I suppose Mr Millis knows at least as much about the battle as Mr l'Estrange?" said Dorothy.

"Why, my dear, you cannot know what you are saying. Mr Millis know as much as Mr l'Estrange! Why, ha, ha, ha! Mr l'Estrange was *there*—was wounded there—behaved most gallantly, as my husband says."

"Why, my dear Mrs Stanshon, Mr l'Estrange is a surveyor, employed——"

"Oh, this is too absurd, ha, ha, ha! surveyor, ha, ha, ha! I'll tell you all about it directly; but I can't help being diverted. If I had only been at home yesterday, all this,—ha, ha, ha!—how very ridiculous!"

Doris and Una were rapidly exchanging glances, while they watched for every word. Miss Clowance, a little discomposed by Mrs Stanshon's merriment, rather stiffened herself in her chair, and waited for further information.

Mrs Stanshon wiped her eyes, which had been running over with her laughter, and said: "You'll laugh too, my dear, when I tell you that Mr l'Estrange is a lieutenant in my husband's regiment, and a most promising young officer. He came to see me at my friend's house at Cookwort, and gave me such a deal of information about the army. I think him so nice and so clever."

"But Mr l'Estrange told us that he was a surveyor, and he is actually employed about here in——"

"Told you he was *surveying*, perhaps, which is a different thing from representing himself as a surveyor. The facts are these: When his wound began to get well, the doctors said he was quite unfit for the fatigues of the campaign, and the shortest way of becoming effective again would be to go home. So he was invalided. Soon becoming better, he wanted to return to the army, but a medical board said he must not go out till the winter was over."

"What has this to do with the Government survey?"

"Oh, I forgot. You see, Mr l'Estrange knew a little of drawing, and was often employed by the Quartermaster-General. When he found that he could not go back to his duty, he thought he might improve the time of the interval by practising himself in drawing ground,—hill-sketching, I believe they call it; and so he asked and obtained leave to come and practise on the great survey. That's the story."

A flash of something very like triumph shot out of Doris Adair's eyes when Mrs Stanshon's story was told, and presently the flash was drowned in moisture. Doris experienced a rush of feelings of different kinds, and the emotion overpowered her. It was Miss Eleanor who now took up the conversation with Mrs Stanshon, and asked all about Mr l'Estrange's history, and

how he had been wounded, and said she always knew that he was a well-bred young man, whatever profession he might have followed, and she was not a bit surprised to find that he was an officer in the king's service. How he could have forborne to say what he was when Mr Millis argued so saucily with him she could not divine. She only wished that somebody had known, and had set the conceited little man down.

Dorothy was silent, or nearly so, because a chill seemed to have struck her at the heart. All of us have experienced the incidence of what we call a presentiment, and can understand how Dorothy was visited. The thought of the conversation which she had that morning had with Eleanor came forcibly back to her mind—of the confidence which she had then felt, founded upon L'Estrange's humble position. Now he was suddenly metamorphosed; she thought the change was aimed at her peace of mind, and that it was intended to give a body to Eleanor's forebodings. She hoped that some guidance would come to her; but for the moment she felt heart-sick and void of counsel. And when Mrs Stanshon left, and Doris immediately gave voice to her triumph, Miss Clowance's perplexity was in no wise assuaged.

How things "got about" in Veorse was an inquiry to which the oldest inhabitant had never heard a satisfactory answer, and one which the youngest thinker did not seem likely to solve. Certain it is that they did get about with extraordinary rapidity; and, to cite a case which was very much to the point, in less than half an hour from the time of Mrs Stanshon's visit, it was known all over Veorse to high and low, rich and poor, that the young man who had succoured Miss Una Clowance the other day was not a measurer or map-maker at all, but a captain from the wars, who had been hewing down Frenchmen only six months ago, and who intended shortly to return to that invigorating exercise, but was for the present giving the muscles of his arm a rest, and leading as gentle a life about Veorse as if he had never seen a gaping wound or grown ferocious at the flow of blood.

Mr Millis's card-party of that evening had an attraction such as nobody expected it to have. A live soldier, almost fresh from the campaign in which everybody felt such deep interest, was one of the guests. A very distinguished guest he was too; and the company sat very deep into the night, engaged in war-like talk, and in extracting from the military man all he could tell them about the life in the field. Mr Millis himself was all courtesy. He was not disconcerted at discovering L'Estrange's profession, but rather the contrary. He couldn't be expected

to know as much of military matters as a real soldier; and he still enjoyed the pre-eminence in that line among civilians.

Henceforth L'Estrange became a man of mark in Veorse. There was no further need of asking people to show him attention. Everybody who had hospitality or any civility to offer was glad to ask his acceptance of it. And the little place became quite lively in consequence. L'Estrange was occupied all day; but for his evening's amusement he had only to choose whose guest he would be. His admiration of Miss Adair was so undisguised that all the world noticed it, and began to speculate on the event, while some shook their heads and referred to "that unhappy affair" of Miss Una Clowance six years ago.

Doris, though she may have been allowed to appear at small friendly parties, had not yet formally taken a place in society, and was still, as regarded the *beau monde*, an infant. Spite of this disqualification, she had not blushed entirely unseen, but had attracted the notice of most of the cavaliers of Veorse, who had each, separately, entered it among his notes of the heart, that Miss Adair would be well worthy of devotion some of these days, but who were so much occupied with somewhat older beauties that they had not yet had time to bow down before Doris. L'Estrange, who was quite free from contemporary attractions, recognised, it might be a little prematurely, Doris's claims to admiration, whereupon the bachelors perceived that they had delayed the worship of her too long, and the young lady passed at a step from nowhere to the throne of love and beauty. It was not so terrible a trial to her as it might have been to some. Nature herself, and not Nature's journeymen, had wrought on her, and made her very fit for the part which she had to play.

Doris had rather got to windward of society by falling in love, and securing an admirer before she was conventionally out of the nursery. All speculation, such as had been indulged in by Miss Clowance, on the short-lived character of Doris's fancy, was now out of place. The little disguise under which L'Estrange had appeared, and the sudden transformation of him into an officer who had fought and bled for his country, were incidents very certain to fasten a fancy, and expand it into a serious passion. It was a very unmistakable case.

"Well, Dorothy," said Mr Clowance, "it might have been much worse, you know. The young man is in an honourable profession, and bears a good character; that much we know."

"Hang your rising young officers!" retorted Dorothy; "they were ordained to be the plagues of this house. If I had known—if I had only suspected—but it seems to have been just

fated. The mischief was done before we knew that there was danger."

"Don't let us look at it as a danger or a misfortune. Why must it be the one thing or the other? You can find nothing to complain of in the young man himself, and I will at once make inquiries with a view of ascertaining who his friends may be."

"Whoever may be his friends, his place now is with the army abroad. There must be a separation, and one knows not what that may mean. Would to heaven that he had kept with his soldiers, and not come here to disturb the peace of a quiet, inoffensive family."

"It is a pity," said the clergyman, "that your *bête noire* is not saleable; because I fancy many enterprising mothers and daughters would be quite willing to take it off your hands at a considerable premium. While you are bemoaning the hard stroke of fate, our niece is regarded as a heroine whom fortune has come to meet half-way."

Thus did Percival endeavour to make the best of what he himself in his heart admitted to be a doubtful good. The occasion was an anxious one for the family; and many a parent and guardian had, before their day, demanded in despair why these men of war were suffered to come in and destroy the peace of families by winning the affections of unreflecting damsels. Clearly it is a provision made by Nature, that soldiers and sailors shall, especially in times of danger, strongly influence the imagination of the other sex. And the reason is, that if some such hallucination were not in force, the services must be doomed to perpetual celibacy; for it may be presumed that not many a girl, enlightened by a calm and discreet judgment, would be willing to put her happiness and comfort to such peril as belongs to the soldier's or the sailor's wife.

The Clowance family did nothing, one may be sure, to promote the love affair, which was now only too apparent. They sought the society of L'Estrange less than they would have done had there been no love-making, but they were not uncivil to the young man; and he, trusting to the kind expressions which he had heard from them when he first came to the neighbourhood, and being conscious of no just cause for an altered feeling on their part, made as many errands to the house as decently he could. He was not always successful in finding Doris, but very often he saw her. During the day he was, as has been seen, occupied in hill sketching; but at many of the little evening parties to which he was asked, he had the pleasure of meeting Doris, and while mixing with others in the

ordinary amusements, they managed to become more and more in love with each other.

Mrs Stanshon, when applied to concerning L'Estrange's family, said that she believed him to be the son of an officer of rank in the army, but she could give no particulars. She wrote to her husband on the subject, but it took a long time to correspond with any one in the Peninsular army. And, indeed, matters worked themselves to a head much too quickly to be regulated by that or by any other precautionary means.

When the time came to be reckoned, it was found that L'Estrange had been more than four weeks in Veorse. How it could be four weeks nobody could imagine, for it seemed like yesterday that Una had slipped into the stream; but the inexorable almanac made some thirty days of it. The work of the survey around Veorse was being rapidly completed, and L'Estrange had been making allusions to his departure. The bachelors of Veorse, among whom by this time he had become very popular, gave their little annual dance earlier than usual, and much before the end of the season, in order that he might be a guest; and a very pleasant and happy dance it was, especially to some people.

There had been a hard battle to fight to obtain Miss Adair's presence at the entertainment. Doris did not yet go to balls. She would be much better at home than at a party of that description, her aunts, or two of her aunts, said. The bachelors pleaded that this could not, by any fair employment of language, be called a ball. Only a quiet little party, such as everybody had been in the habit of giving all the winter. It would be a sore disappointment to each and all of the entertainers if they could not have the pleasure of receiving Miss Adair. It would be observed that the hour of assembling was quite early, and there was nothing about the party to indicate that it would be in the least formal; younger ladies than Miss Adair were to be permitted to attend. Una kept Doris quite silent and undemonstrative; but no one in the house could pretend to think that the loss of the dance would be other than a grievous disappointment to her. Dorothy held out for long, but eventually had to give way. The whole house went to the dance.

While yet the question was pending, Doris had been provisionally engaged to L'Estrange for certain dances. She looked charming on the occasion, in a way that was quite new in her. People said that she had changed from a girl to a woman in the last two months. Dorothy and Eleanor perceived the heightening of Doris's beauty, but could feel no triumph in the sight of it. To them their niece seemed as a sacrifice made lovely only

to meet a sad fate. They even thought that it would have been a comfort if Doris had been a girl of ordinary appearance, such as no gay young man would have troubled himself about, and who might by-and-by have married some quiet householder of Veorsa. They only sighed as they saw Doris's light figure threading the tangles of the dance, and heard the felicitations of their friends on her appearance as if they had been condolences. They would not leave their care at home for this one night of amusement. But the same could not be said of Una and Doris. Those two young ladies seemed determined to allow no trouble to come nigh them to-night on account of either the past or the future.

Doris by-and-by was tired with the unwonted exercise. She had stood up to dance with L'Estrange, but said she really must sit down again and rest; and she asked to be led back to her aunts. "Come into this room and rest on the sofa," said L'Estrange.

"No, I cannot sit away from my aunts."

"Let us speak to Miss Una. Miss Una, Miss Adair says she must rest just now, but insists upon going to her place with her aunts. Is that necessary?"

"She ought not to be away from her friends," said sly Una; "but I am her aunt, you know, and I think I too should like to sit down for a little. Mr Plowden, I must rest a while; do you mind sitting in the next room for a time?"

"Not in the least, Miss Una; I shall be very happy there or anywhere with you." Una had several admirers, although she favoured none; and they were all very anxious to seize a chance of earning her approbation.

Thus it was that this incautious party found itself remote from the dancers—the ladies fanning themselves, the gentlemen both very full of agitating thoughts. Mr Plowden was flattering himself that Una's gracious behaviour was not without a meaning, and he put forth all his efforts to improve the happy occasion, quite heedless of what might be occurring in any other part of the room. L'Estrange, more in love than ever he had been, was simply worshipping and wondering how a new power of beauty had come to Doris, and whether it was all a fable about that zone of Venus which could suddenly gild what had been already refined gold.

"I don't know," said Una to her beau, "what Miss Milly Graves will say to me."

"Say to you, Miss Una! what should she have to say?"

"For taking you away from the dance, you know."

"That surely is not Miss Milly Graves's affair?"

"Well, that is the question. I am afraid she may make it so."

"I can't understand. Why should you suppose that Miss Milly Graves would trouble herself about me or my whereabouts?"

"I thought she might feel an interest in you."

"I don't know why."

"I heard of your gallantry to her a few days ago."

"My dear Miss Una, I assure you, upon my honour, it was only this. You see Miss Milly Graves was coming from the Mathwick direction on foot, and there was a very thick fog, and the night fell suddenly, and——"

Here Mr Plowden plunged into an explanation, in the course of which Una frequently expressed herself incredulous, thus causing him to protest afresh, and pursue his vindication with increased vehemence. Neither Doris nor L'Estrange observed his earnestness, for they were engaged in a little conversation of their own which they thought interesting.

"Are you very tired?" asked L'Estrange.

"I am, indeed; but I hope not so badly but that a little rest will restore me."

"These dances are so fatiguing. Even I, who am on my feet all day, feel them when I am not in constant practice."

"Yes, it is very different from walking. Tell me how much longer shall you have work to do about Veorse?"

"Not many days."

"And then you will move to——?"

"I shall probably move to Spain."

"To Spain! to the army? I thought you were going to another town in the Furze Range, to continue your sketching."

"That was the arrangement, under the belief that I could not return to my military duty. But this fine air has so restored me, that the doctors are likely to be more accommodating, and to sanction my going almost immediately."

"Oh, how cruel! And it was so positively arranged that you would go to another station in the Range!"

"There has been no cruelty. I petitioned earnestly to be allowed to return to my regiment the moment that I should be thought fit for service. And it would only have been for a little if I had shifted my quarters in this district."

"But we should have seen you sometimes. It would not be like crossing the seas and going to the war."

"I shall be farther away. I shall regret leaving Veorse more than I can tell. But, after all, it is better perhaps to be at some distance than to be so near that there will be always just communication enough to cause incessant regret."

"You want to forget all about Veorse?"

"No, I shall never forget Veorse. And there is a person in Veorse that will never be out of my thoughts till I see her again."

"There are beautiful girls in Spain."

"Yes; beautiful according to some men's tastes."

"They will soon efface recollection of acquaintances at home."

"Why should you think so? I have ventured among them already. I have not found their charms so irresistible."

"I don't know why I think so," answered Doris. "I feel as if any disagreeable thing were possible. I did not expect that you were going to the army. I had not the least idea of it."

"I am going to the army. I am going to Spain, and it may be to other lands. But wherever I may go, Doris, I shall never see any one whom I can regard as I do you. I shall never forget this evening, and this room. I shall never cease to think of you, and to long for the day when I may see you again. That is the state of my feelings and hopes. Now tell me, will you think of me when I am away? Will you be glad to see me back again?"

"Yes, I will think of you," said Doris, softly.

"You give me your promise?"

"Yes."

"And if it should be long before I can come, how long will your patience last?"

"As long as yours. I shall never forget if you do not."

"Nay, Doris, I did not intend to make you sad. I will never willingly bring a tear to your dear eyes. Collect yourself. Some of the dancers will be coming this way immediately. I am sure you feel the fatigue and the heat very much. Let me get you some refreshment."

How many hundred times has a conversation like the above passed in one of the bye-rooms of a gay party! The words were very vague; they were spoken amid excitement; they might mean much or little, according to the feelings of the speakers. Many a youth has indulged in a similar exchange of ideas by way of leave-taking, departed the next day amid a shower of demonstrations understood by *him*, from the girl he is leaving behind him, and been, in a fortnight, ready to repeat the scene. When he hears that Miss So-and-so is married, or that there is a desperate flirt of that name at his former station, he scarcely identifies her with the object of his three months' devotion. The lady perhaps hears that Captain So-and-so has been married, or killed (it matters not which), and

thinks she remembers somebody of that name, rather an agreeable man.

Such words may pass between a pair who regard them very differently—one of whom considers them the perfectly allowable language of flirtation, and the other as words of fate, determining the future of a life for weal or woe. And the result must be misery to this last.

But again, such words may be spoken in all sincerity on both sides. And yet they are only words which for their power depend on the strength of the feeling which caused their utterance. They may be forgotten and repented of. L'Estrange knew this, if Doris did not. L'Estrange had been sorely tried as to what would be his right course with regard to Doris. He could not bear the thought of leaving her without some engagement to wait for his return. On the other hand, he knew that the time of his return was uncertain, and the dangers of his profession were such that it might be he would never return. Would it not be kinder to Doris to leave her perfectly free, while, at the same time, he would undertake to return whenever the opportunity of doing so might be afforded him? That retreat into the side-room decided the question for him. Though intending to be very guarded and discreet, he had been betrayed into expressions of deep import; and he had drawn from Doris a confession which he had no right to draw unless he was ready to pledge himself to her.

He could not clear his thoughts during the excitement of the dance; and indeed no further opportunity offered during the evening of confidential conversation. But as soon as he was alone, and had time to reflect on what had occurred, he saw that there was no further room for debate with himself. The rubicon had been passed: his honour, his own desire, and his love and duty towards Doris, pointed all to the same course. He was deeply in love; his chief desire was to engage Doris to be his wife. But since the rather sudden permission had been given to return to the army, he felt remorse for having allowed himself to do anything calculated to win Doris's affection; he perceived to what a life of anxiety he would leave her, while the war should last. But the die was now cast. He would lose no time in saying plainly and openly what he had hinted at in the corner of the side-room.

CHAPTER VIII

A GIRL LEFT BEHIND

Aunt Eleanor had a headache next morning, and remained in bed till late in the day. Doris, who did not quite know whether she was merry or sorrowful this morning, and whose brain was not very steady, carried a cup of tea to aunt Eleanor, and told her it was a beautiful morning, and the sunshine would probably take her headache away.

"I daresay it will," said aunt Eleanor. "I am not very bad; but I don't stand hot rooms and late hours so well as I once could. Doris, my dear, you were very much admired last night. I never saw you look so well."

"I, aunt Eleanor?"

"I thought you must have had some friend among the fairies, who had brought the prince in disguise, and made you especially charming that he might have no chance of escape."

"Did you detect the prince, aunt Eleanor?"

"No, but we shall hear of him afterwards. That is always the way. Last night you reminded me so much of your mother. It was at a dance your father first saw her."

"And did they love each other directly?"

"Directly. He came to the house next day to confirm the courtship, and he never discontinued his attentions for six months, at the end of which time they were married."

"They never knew what it was to be separated, or to have delays and crosses come between them?"

"Never; it was all—why, Doris dear, what has come over you? You were as bright and gay as possible when you entered the room. The excitement of last night must have been too much for you. You must rest yourself this morning, and perhaps take a little walk later in the day, as it is fine."

"I was only thinking how happy papa and mamma must have been to have things go so smoothly with them—never to be made miserable by absence, or uncertainty, or——"

"Why should their happy lot make you sad? You—but I will not detain you here, my dear; I am sure you want a little quiet to compose your nerves. Is not that your aunt Dorothy I hear in her room? You might ask her as you pass to come in and speak to me, will you?"

But the message was anticipated by the coming of Miss Clowance to the door of her sister's room, just as it was deliv-

ered to Doris. The latter, who met her aunt at the door, explained that she had just been coming to seek her; then she went away and left the sisters together.

"Anything the matter, Eleanor?" asked Dorothy.

"Not much with me," answered Eleanor; "I am feeling rested now, and shall soon rise. But I wanted to speak to you about that child Doris."

"Has she told you anything?"

"No; but we have been talking about the ball and other things suggested by it; and it has struck me that her heart is more deeply affected than we had a notion of."

"The excitement of the dance is still on her."

"I don't judge by what she said of the dance. She let fall expressions about partings, and long absences, and crosses, and was evidently much overcome."

"Poor child! I doubt not she will feel Mr l'Estrange's going (I wish he had never come), and be unhappy for some little time. But we could not help it; and it will not last long. Fortunately, there has been nothing said between them; and she will forget all about the little affair after a while."

"Are you sure that nothing has been said?"

"Nothing of a serious or deliberate character; and I must say I am glad that it is so. I want no more of the anxieties that young officers, as lovers, produce."

"I don't know," said Eleanor, doubtfully; "according to my idea, a perfect cavalier must have a sword by his side. And you can't have the romance and the glory without some drawbacks."

"Romance and glory! fiddlesticks!" answered Miss Clowance. "I quite wonder, Eleanor, how at your age you can speak so. You make me think of the song which poor Lady Salusbury used to tell us, that the villagers sang in the early days of the war—

"Oh, blessed be the day when the sawgers come to town,
For they be men of honour belonging to the crown!"

"Oh yes," said Eleanor, rather warming to the old ditty; "how did it go on? I can't recollect the next lines, but there was one verse that said—

"There is one among them all,
That is proper, straight, and tall;
As the moon outshines the stars,
So my love outshines 'em all."

And then, and then—I know she was going to marry him."

"Well, it ended in her saying—

'Upon my life, I'll be his wife,
Or for un I will die.'

"Yes, that was it."

"All very well in a song, Eleanor; but when it really comes to dying, or even to great misery or anxiety, it's not to be lightly thought of. I hope and trust that there is nothing in this little matter which will not be forgotten in a few weeks."

"I am sure he admires Doris."

"That may be. But I think he has had too much good feeling to think of letting her know of his admiration. Indeed, I feel sure that he has not mentioned it to her; for he has always shown that he has proper feelings, and he would not have come to any understanding with Doris without taking some of her relations into his confidence. He has not done *that*, so I feel easy. Who's there? come in." The last words were caused by a knock at the door.

"If you please, Miss Clowance, Mr l'Estrange is below, and he says he should be obliged if he could speak with you, ma'am, for a few minutes."

"Mr l'Estrange! how very curious!" exclaimed Eleanor.

"Talk of anything but——" said Dorothy. "Well, ask Mr l'Estrange to sit down, and say I will come to him immediately."

"Do you think it is—do you think it can be—about the child, Dorothy?"

"I can't tell, Eleanor. But, no, I don't think it is. Why should it be? We have heated our imaginations with pondering this matter, and we fancy now that every little occurrence must have reference to it. Perhaps it is some commonplace affair that he wishes to speak about, or he may be come to take leave. You know he has not many days left disposable now. But the only way to end doubt and know what his visit is about, is to go and see him; and that I will do."

"Do, Dorothy. Something tells me that it is about our Doris. I shall be in a fever till I know. Come to me as soon as he is gone."

Eleanor could not keep her eyes fixed on the rational aspect of the situation. She could at all times be interested in a love affair; and the interest was not reduced if there were dragons and pitfalls in the way of a happy ending. She would have thought much worse of L'Estrange if he had not admired Doris. She was greatly satisfied that Doris should have brought an admirer—a worthy admirer—to her feet, before the world

which marries and gives in marriage had recognised her as an entity. Her headache was gone now. She thought she would rise.

Notwithstanding that Miss Clowance, as she descended the stairs to meet L'Estrange, kept telling herself that the visit was concerning some very ordinary matter, she, being a not very artificial person, could not help wearing a certain severity of manner, though she intended to be quite cordial. And, as if to justify her *quasi* grave brow, L'Estrange had a deprecatory, sad look. They did not meet at all like two people who were going to have a lively chat over the gaiety of the evening before. The young man took Dorothy's hand in his impressively, and said he was aware that he had taken a liberty in demanding to see her at that hour.

"I am quite disengaged, and at your service, Mr l'Estrange," said Dorothy. "What can I do for you?"

"My first petition is that you will be good enough to listen to me for a few minutes, for I must preface my main subject with one or two remarks. You are aware, Miss Clowance, that I am to leave Veorse in a very few days. Till very lately I expected that I should have moved, for the present, to some town at no great distance from this; now it is otherwise. I am going at once back to the army."

"Indeed!" said Dorothy; "I was not prepared for that. I hope that you will be successful wherever you go. Your career will be watched by many friendly eyes in Veorse."

"I am delighted to think so. Indeed, that is exactly what I did presume to think, and I hoped that the thought accurately reflected the relations between my friends in Veorse and me. I might carry away my own particular regrets. If they were poignant, it would matter only to myself. But—but since yesterday I have had reason to think that I may leave behind me in Veorse an interest warmer than mere friendship; it is that belief which has caused me to ask your attention to-day."

"Pray, speak out plainly, Mr l'Estrange. Hints and allusions are apt to mislead."

"From the day when I first made your acquaintance, I have been an ardent admirer of your niece, Miss Adair." Miss Clowance sighed; it was all too true that she had feared. He went on—

"I did not believe that my admiration had been understood or returned by Miss Adair; and latterly, since I have known of my speedy departure, I have put selfish desires aside, and tried to rejoice that my going would not cause her regret.

Last night I was undeceived. I find that I have been more pointed in my attentions than I was myself aware of, and that I have attained to the happiness of having gained her affection."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Dorothy.

"Nay," answered L'Estrange, "if that is your opinion, Miss Clowance, I shall disappoint you greatly. Ashamed I most certainly am not. On one account I am distressed: I mean that every one who is interested in a military man at this time, must be liable to much anxiety, if not to eventual sorrow and bereavement. And I would rather forego all place in Miss Adair's affections than cause to her a minute of distress. But it is too late to think of that now. I have heard words from Miss Adair's lips which convince me that she is not indifferent to my fate; and I have taken the very earliest opportunity of revealing to you how matters stand, and of expressing my entreaty and hope that I may be allowed to look upon Miss Adair as my future wife."

"You have brought trouble upon all this house, sir," said Dorothy. "We were happy, and unsuspecting of any harm before you came to Veorse."

"Believe in my most sincere sorrow for any grief that I may cause to you or yours. Events have come about I scarcely know how; and I feel that all at once I have to deal with facts, and that regrets ought not to be indulged in now, as they will but hinder important considerations."

"Are you in a position to marry?" said Miss Clowance, beginning to get her ideas a little clear.

"I hope to be so in a moderately short period, if things go well with me and with the country. I have some small private means. Promotion is pretty certain, if I live a little longer. And I look forward to employment on the staff of the army, which is better paid than regimental service, and more convenient for a married officer."

"Do your own relations sanction the proposal which you make?"

"My parents are both dead. I was their only child. There is no near relation who can have any right to interfere with my marriage. My father was Colonel l'Estrange, once very well known in the service, and employed on the staff by the Duke of York, after whom I am named. My mother's maiden name was St John."

"Your being without family ties may account for the little consideration you have shown for a family's feelings. I really cannot at this moment tell what to say to you. I must consult

Miss Adair's other relatives, and request you to wait for your answer until that has been done. You don't know what a misery you have brought upon us all."

"I might have, perhaps, spared some present perplexity by keeping secret the knowledge which I acquired last night. I did not think it honourable to do that; and I trust that you, upon reflection, will feel that, however inconsiderately I may have acted before, I have only done my duty to you and to myself in coming at once to put you in possession of the matter, and to ask your consent to my suit."

"I should not have approved of concealment of any kind; that I am quite ready to say. Before making any further admission, I should like to think over all that has occurred. You shall hear from me shortly."

And Dorothy rose, to show him that the interview was at an end. L'Estrange asked for her hand, which she gave him, and which he pressed as he had done when she received him. Then he withdrew.

The council of three which sat to discuss this important matter may have fancied that it had a great deal to decide on; but in reality it had only to accept what destiny had decreed. The council consisted of the Reverend Percival and his two eldest sisters, the dignity of a seat not having been conceded to the Republic, who was still thought too young and inexperienced to advise on grave subjects. Doris had been examined, and her answers and her silences had more than confirmed all that L'Estrange had ventured to say concerning the state of her affections. "What can we do, Dorothy?" asked Eleanor; "there is not the least chance of their giving each other up at present; and it is much better that there should be an engagement under our sanction, than that there should be a stolen one." Miss Clowance said that this was true; but she added that she did not see why there should be an engagement at all. Doris was but a child, and it was quite possible that she did not know her own mind. With her attractions, she would be sure to have admirers in plenty; and if any of them should persuade her to change her mind, it were well that she should be free to do so. Miss Clowance had come to have quite a morbid horror of young officers, and welcomed every argument which tended to keep ties with such from being drawn tight.

Mr Clowance did not think that the existence or non-existence of a formal engagement would much affect the ultimate issue of the affair; but he admitted that Doris's extreme youth afforded a good reason why they should object to her being in any way contracted. When Mr l'Estrange might think himself

in a position to marry, let him come and renew his suit. In the meantime, let him not bind himself nor seek to bind Miss Adair.

"Fate may get us out of it," sighed Dorothy, "just as it has got us in."

"A great many chances may affect the case," answered her brother, "but I must say (I believe I have said it before) that I do not see why this must be regarded as an unmitigated misfortune. There will be delay and anxiety, no doubt; but the end may be very satisfactory. The young man is much above the common, and not unlikely to have a prosperous career. If not rich, he has some means. His family is good. And, as far as one may judge, he is likely to make an affectionate husband. Why should we be so opposed to this?"

"I should not be opposed," Dorothy said, "if the marriage were going to be at once. But I cannot reconcile myself to allowing the poor child to be bound through all her youth by an engagement which after all may come to nothing, there are so many chances against it."

And the result was that the council would recognise no formal betrothal. It would not absolutely oppose its niece in a matter which might very nearly concern her happiness. But neither could it, under present circumstances, approve of the proposed match. Should both parties remain in the same mind until the end of the war, or until such time as the marriage might take place, the council, if still extant, would be ready again to consider the case.

"It will be an engagement all the same," Doris said to Una after the decree had been announced. "I shall not change, neither will he. I should like to have been able to write to him; but he will find means of letting us know of his fortunes, and he will hear through Mrs Stanshon how things are going here. I shall not complain."

"Complain, no!" answered Una. "You have every reason to rejoice, my dear. He is certain to come back in good time, and you will have a happy marriage. In general, happiness that is really worth having comes only after a trying patience. But it is sure to come."

L'Estrange was displeased with the decision only so far as it seemed to imply distrust in himself. It would not affect his conduct in the least, and he thought he could thoroughly believe in Doris. He felt that he had done what was right; he had spoken out like a man; and if the Clowance family did not at this moment appreciate his conduct, they would be sure to do so ere long. It was painful to be obliged to go at once, when

he might have lingered a day or two longer; but he felt that he ought to go now that an engagement had been forbidden.

The leave-taking was in Miss Clowance's presence, and was a quiet scene outwardly. "I remember and adhere to every word that I have ever said to you, Miss Adair," said L'Estrange. "I shall think constantly of you and of the words when I am far away, and I trust the day is not very distant when I may be here again to renew my demand for your hand."

"I, too, will be constant and patient," answered Doris, "be the trial for months or for years. One thing only—a thing which I believe to be impossible—shall ever weaken my affection, and that is any change on your part. But I am sure it will not be." She controlled herself like a heroine, and bade him adieu, strong in the hope that their next meeting would be a scene of a different character. Indeed, aunt Dorothy showed more emotion than Doris at parting. She assured L'Estrange that she was really his friend, and that she wished well to him, and hoped that all manner of success would attend him, and that he would come back an officer of rank. Duty was unpleasant sometimes, but it must be done, as he well knew. He ought not to think the worse of her for doing hers.

"Thank you, Miss Clowance; good-bye. God bless you! I hope the day is coming when we may all smile at the thought of these troubles."

Then his and Doris's eyes met in a last expressive look, and he left the room. Eleanor and Una were waiting to say farewell to him in the drawing-room. Eleanor was much affected, and Una confident of his quick return. He left, feeling that he had certainly no enemy in the house—nobody that would unfairly frustrate his hopes. His heart was heavy, it is true, but he had much in his mind that was consolatory.

CHAPTER IX.

EMBARKATION FOR THE WARS.

It was not necessary to interrupt the narrative of the course of events at Veorse by describing a journey which L'Estrange made to London; but, of course, it will have been inferred that he could not, without going thither, have obtained the medical sanction to his return to his regiment, nor received so speedily

the necessary authority for procuring a passage to some Peninsular port near to where our army was operating. To have found his own passage would not have been easy: the enemy was keeping such naval watch as was in his power off the coasts of France and Portugal; the merchant vessels which ventured on that voyage were not numerous, and not very comfortable for passengers; and they waited generally until they could take the seas under the convoy of a man, or of men, of war. Hence their departure was uncertain as to time.

L'Estrange took the opportunity of being in London to make some inquiries relative to the connections of his father's family. He had much wished to attend to these inquiries before, but on his return from Spain he had not been well enough to pursue them. Now that he was strong again, he determined to make what examination the time of his leave would permit.

His intended marriage had made him desirous of ascertaining all that he could concerning family matters. His partial ignorance on this head is not to be wondered at, seeing that he lost both parents when he was young, and that he was now without any near relation.

Independently, however, of the new ties which he hoped to contract, his curiosity concerning his paternal grandfather's house had been aroused by a *rencontre* with a relation (or a person claiming to be so) which he had in Spain; and he was most desirous of ascertaining, before he should return to the army, whether he had a relation living or not. The meeting which caused him afterwards to inquire into this matter was sufficiently singular even in a theatre of war, where strange things are of daily occurrence.

During the long series of manœuvres which took place previous to the battle of Salamanca, L'Estrange was employed in inspecting and reporting on the roads over which it was likely that the armies would immediately pass. It was a dangerous duty, for the two armies were close together, moving on parallel lines; and an explorer or sketcher was not unlikely to be walked up by the enemy. He had one day got an opportunity, when all appeared very quiet, of jotting down the particulars of a road practicable for artillery, and after having noted a series of bearings and descriptive remarks, he was seated on a stone, in a recess of the rocks, making a connected sketch of the road in question. His position was admirably chosen; for so had Nature disported herself in forming the place that it seemed designed for security—at any rate, for security from observation. A narrow entrance between two immense stones, which

to a first glance seemed to lead no whither, but to be simply a fissure of slight depth, made a sudden turn between two high walls, as it were, and conducted the explorer into a secret area, into which no casual passenger was at all likely to pry. Only some one employed as L'Estrange was, or some initiated comer, could be expected to intrude here.

He was deep in the study of his work when he heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs along the road, and paused to gather from them the direction which the traveller was taking, the pace at which he might be moving, whether he might be a soldier, and so on. Suddenly the footfalls, which had been sharp and clear, had a muffled sound, which was nevertheless audible. The change could be accounted for only by supposing that the rider had turned off the road, and was easing his animal's feet by moving on the turf. The noise did not, however, fade away into distance, and presently the sketcher was disagreeably surprised by hearing the grinding of the iron shoes on the gravel, which had been washed from the containing rocks on to the winding entrance to his retreat.

He knew of no way of escape by another opening, and of no place of concealment within, so had to wait for the sequel of the adventure, for which he prepared himself (in case it should prove unfriendly) by drawing out and cocking a pistol.

It was not a trooper nor a voyaging mountaineer who presently appeared, but a woman leading a capable-looking horse, which latter wound himself into the little rocky area as if he were acquainted with it, or at least with similar crypts.

The female, who was well set up, and of pleasant countenance, manifested not the slightest surprise at sight of the officer, but approached him with a little courtesy, and astonished him by addressing him in his native tongue.

"I thought," she said, "that you must be here. I had watched you, at intervals, making your notes, and had headed you by a bridle-path; then, instead of coming upon you, I found the road deserted. It will, no doubt, be pretty numerously occupied in a day or two."

L'Estrange raised his cap. It was a relief to find that he could communicate freely with the fair stranger.

"You have not, I presume, madam, observed my movements without having an object in view. May I venture to inquire what it is?"

"Certainly. I know your employment, and your name, Mr l'Estrange. Perhaps my possession of that knowledge may prove to you that I am in the confidence of some well-informed persons in the British army."

L'Estrange bowed. He had learned to be cautious; and he knew well that the lady would have more to say.

"I have much reason to believe that I understand General Marmont's plan in manœuvring as he is doing on this line. I cannot judge of the accuracy of the information which I have received, so as to make it useful to Lord Wellington, without first inspecting a map of some kind, so as to judge of the direction of the roads and mountain-passes relatively to certain fords and bridges of the Tormea."

The young officer was still uncertain as to the lady's object, and feared to commit himself by making a remark. So he simply bowed again.

"You, of course, understand," she went on, "that this information which I have received may be of the greatest importance?"

"Possibly, madam," answered L'Estrange at last. "But to satisfy yourself as to the roads and bridges, might it not be expedient to go and inspect them?"

"Very expedient and very desirable. It is the thing which I should certainly do, had I time to spare. But my warning, if it is to be of service, must be given at once. I have followed you hither on purpose, believing that your portfolio may contain sketches such as I desire to see."

"I am unable to exhibit the contents of my portfolio to any one except my superior officer, or some one duly authorised by him to see them."

"Not when the occasion is one of pressing importance? Pray, sir, consider."

"I do consider, and must decline to give any information. If the General wishes maps to be at your disposal, he can order them to be presented to you. From your knowing my name, I imagine that you must be in communication with some English officers."

"I am so. But experience has taught me that information to be acceptable must be complete, not contingent on something unknown. I mean that one must offer decided information, and not suspicion."

"I am sorry I cannot help you, madam."

"As to my knowledge of your name," continued the lady, "of course I have obtained that from those with whom I am in communication. But the name itself is familiar enough to me. You must have heard your father speak of his sister—his half-sister. I am that person."

"I never heard of my father having had a sister or a half-sister."

"I was not brought up with your father. Your grandfather, who was my father, was twice married. Inquire and you will find that this is true."

"I must hear of such a relationship under very different circumstances before I give attention to the claim."

"The circumstances are, no doubt, somewhat curious, but where war is raging curious things often occur. As we may be again thrown together, please to remember that I am married to a Portuguese gentleman, and that I am known as Senhora Valdez."

"Your husband, I presume, is with the Portuguese contingent of the army?"

"That is a point on which I must be reticent until I can obtain your confidence. Some services on which I have been, and hope to be, engaged on behalf of our army oblige me to preserve much mystery concerning my present connections."

"May I ask how you tracked me hither? This seems a secluded enough spot."

"It is so. It has been long known to me and to my horse. We have often lain concealed here. I knew that you were on the road. I was sure that you were not in advance of me. You could not be seen when I retraced my steps, and it required no great penetration to guess that you might be here."

To do her justice, this mysterious visitor did not waste time in the interview. She endeavoured, as long as there remained a chance of her succeeding, to get a sight of his drawings. When she saw that to be impossible, she bade him adieu, saying that they might meet again, and begging him to remember her when they should do so. Then she went out of the little rocky chamber, and her horse wound himself out after her as if he knew well the turns of the passage.

L'Estrange felt a curiosity to see her depart, and he followed the horse out to the hillside. As he emerged from the cleft, he saw her tightening her girths as if that were an operation very familiar to her, and before he could make a remark, she had sprung into her saddle with a light bound; she waved her whip in adieu, and was off in a gallop.

He was not long in making up his mind that she was one of the mysterious persons who hover about armies in the field, obtaining strange items of information, and occasionally making momentous disclosures to the generals. For some reason or other she was very desirous of getting sight of his sketches. Her claim of relationship was most likely a fiction invented for the furtherance of her purpose. Yet it was a bold assertion to tell him of his grandfather having been twice married

(which was a truth), without knowing something concerning the family!


The incident caused the young man to reflect on the little that he knew of his relations, and to desire to be better informed.

On returning to camp he reported what had happened, and was told that he had acted discreetly. His drawings, however, were demanded, and were retained until after the battle of Salamanca. Indeed, he never again saw them, so that there was some reason for supposing that the lady might have given information at headquarters.

L'Estrange pondered this matter of the relationship for a day or two. Then came the great battle, and his wound. He had been unable to make inquiries before concerning his kindred; but he was unwilling now to return to the army without doing what was in his power to discover whether his father had a half-sister. The information which he was able to glean was but meagre. It did, however, enlighten him to a certain extent. In the course of his subsequent adventures he felt the advantage of obtaining even this sparing advice. But to return to the story.

As soon as the medical restrictions were removed, our young soldier presented himself before some of the chief military authorities, by whom he was very favourably received, the papers regarding his wound and his consequent detention at home having caused a reference to his services, which were found to be very creditable. He was informed that he would be allowed a passage in a man-of-war, for the obtaining of which he would be furnished with a letter to the Admiral at Portsmouth, communication between London and the coast not being so easy in those days that details of passages and embarkations could be arranged in Whitehall.

Nearly all that England sees of the stir and circumstance of war is seen (let us say it thankfully) in her seaports. Elsewhere in the island men read about our wars; at the great ports they see something of the manner in which she puts forth her strength—they can see how the sword is whetted, if they cannot see it smite. When L'Estrange, an observant young man, witnessed the activity that was going on in disembarking and embarking, the quantities of men and stores collected on or near to the wharves, the arms, the clothing, the provisions; when, above all, he saw the energy which was manifest day and night in the great dockyard, men working like bees, and machinery in perpetual motion, huge keels resounding with hammer blows in the ships, hissing hot anchors heaved from the furnaces and battered by dark cyclo-



pean figures, cordage in quantity to net the world like a cabbage, the produce of whole forests lying ready in planks and logs to the carpenters' hands,—when he saw these and a hundred collateral proofs of the exertion of England's might, his heart smote him, and he thought that he and his comrades must have been unjust to their country when they accused her of being indifferent to the wants and sufferings of her warriors.

The charge of indifference may truly have been unjust; but the charge of stupid adherence to worn-out ideas and methods is more difficult to rebut. It seems to have been a cherished opinion then and long after, that individual and associated valour and prowess were the things specially needful in war. It may have been admitted that it was inexpedient to leave fighting men without arms, or provisions, or shelter; but these auxiliaries would have been looked at as on quite a different level from fighting qualities—nay, the latter were supposed capable of, in a great degree, compensating for the want of the former. More especially was a knowledge in our leaders of the art of war looked upon as of secondary importance, provided only that we retained the power of administering hard knocks.

Now it need not be argued in the present day, but only stated, that though courage, endurance, and strength are essential in efficient armies, yet that these qualities do not get their fair opportunities, unless the leading is intelligent, and unless the efforts of the troops are assisted by all the means known and procurable at the period of war. Shelter, rations, clothing, transport, and arms of the most effective character, should always be forthcoming abundantly, in aid of the spirit and exertions of the troops; and that nation which can most liberally and intelligently keep its armies supplied with these, will have an immense advantage in war. The supply of them is not a simple matter, because the things are costly. But that consideration ought to be a consolatory one to Great Britain, because whatever money can buy she has the means of procuring more than any nation on the earth.

She knows all this now; and if she prolongs, or is unsuccessful in, a war through neglect of the economy of thoroughly supplying her legions with every requisite for speedy success, then, "on her eyes be it," as they say in Persia, she has no right to complain.

But in the day when L'Estrange went wearily down to Portsmouth to embark for the Peninsula, the paramount importance of supplies was not generally understood; and, notwithstanding the activity and bustle which he saw at the seaport, we were

not doing all that we might have done. Great Britain was starving the war. The saving of her pence resulted in the expenditure of her pounds. And that was not the worst. The lives, in thousands, of her sons were sacrificed for want of the mechanical and other auxiliaries which would have facilitated the necessary warlike operations. The money could be won back again, but the lives of brave men were gone for ever!

L'Estrange presented himself at the office of the General commanding the troops at Portsmouth, and was there told that as they were exceptionally busy at the time, as he was returning from sick-leave and alone, moreover, as he had been furnished with the means of making a direct claim upon the Admiral for a passage, he might make his arrangements for himself, and would not be required to transact his business through any military department at the station, unless some unforeseen difficulty should occur. Accordingly he proceeded to the Admiral's office, was introduced to the secretary, and delivered his letter. The secretary bade him sit down for a while, and went to take the orders of his chief regarding the matter. Soon returning, he said that the Admiral would see L'Estrange at once, and the latter was taken across a passage to the Admiral's own room, where the chief was standing before the fire in conversation with a captain in uniform who had evidently come ashore on duty. He was holding in his hand the letter which L'Estrange had brought.

"Good day, sir," said the old sailor, who seemed to be of easy and affable disposition. "I see they're anxious to get you back again to the seat of war, and I'm to do what I can to help you. Not an easy thing to do offhand, I can assure you, where there are so many on the move; but I'll see what can be done."

L'Estrange bowed, and thanked him.

"Yes," continued the Admiral, "you shall be borne in mind, depend upon it. In a few days I daresay we may be able to accommodate you. You are staying in the town, I presume. Please to leave your address with my secretary, and to be ready to start at short notice."

L'Estrange said that it was not for him to ask for any especial consideration, but he hoped he would be despatched as early as possible. He cared more about an early passage than about a luxurious berth.

"That's right, young man," answered the Admiral, "that's the right feeling. But I think, from the style of this letter which I have just been reading, that the heads of your own service do think you worthy of some consideration. You have

been wounded, I observe, and are still delicate, Mr—Mr——” And the Admiral adjusted his glasses and began to con over the letter for the young officer's name.

“Ah, Mr l'Estrange, I beg your pardon. Egad, I remember a Captain l'Estrange, a staff-officer, who came home with me from America some quarter of a century ago. Perhaps a connection of yours?”

“I think you are speaking of my father, sir. He was a staff-officer, and returned from America about the time you mention.”

“The deuce! Are you L'Estrange's son? By ——, I think I can recognise a look of him in your features. If you are not engaged for to-day, give me the pleasure of your company at dinner. Captain Oakley,” turning to the captain, “let me present Lieutenant l'Estrange, whom I hope you will see again at dinner-time.”

L'Estrange was experienced enough in the ways of men in office to perceive that things were working for him very favourably. Therefore he forbore from trespassing another minute on the Admiral's time, by which he might have damaged the smooth course of things. So he took his leave, the Admiral shaking hands and reminding him that dinner would be at five. There was plenty to be seen in Portsmouth just then, and he had no difficulty in filling up his time till the dressing-hour.

The Admiral's reception at dinner-time was still kind. L'Estrange met again his new acquaintance, Captain Oakley, and there were several naval officers present, including, of course, the flag-lieutenant. The secretary, near whom L'Estrange sat at table, told him that there was a fresh company there nearly every day, so constant was the coming and going. The Admiral was very hospitable, and told stories of St Vincent and Nelson. There was a celebrated captain present, who had what he called a “reef” in his side, which rather interfered with his balance. The contraction had been caused by a wound received in action with a French ship, which his vessel could easily have overpowered, but which he had chosen to fight with his lower-deck guns only, so as to preserve equality: hence the very sharp action and his “reef.” Another captain was in company who was celebrated for never, when afloat, recognising Sunday in its place, but keeping always a strict account with his crew, so that they might get compensation for any days of rest of which they might have been deprived through the necessities of the service, or what he considered such. On one occasion he was said to have paid up a whole week of Sundays. Another rough old fellow—a thunderbolt of war, with a loud

voice and plenty of quaint sayings—had once been before the mast, but had now a handle to his name.

There were two middies present, sons of peers, and a very fine young gentleman who had just mounted his epaulette, a scion of a wealthy banking house in the city. But the company need not be very particularly described, as it has nothing to do with the story. The important matter of the evening to L'Estrange was, that the Admiral, when he rose from table (where he had sat a good while), took L'Estrange aside, and said—

"I should have been sorry not to be able to help a son of my old friend L'Estrange; and I am happy to tell you that Captain Oakley, the officer you met in my office this morning, has kindly made you the offer of a berth in his brig the *Aiguille*. He is going immediately to Spain with stores and despatches, and will land you at Oporto, which will be the nearest port to the army."

L'Estrange made his acknowledgments for the favour. To which the Admiral replied, "Yes, well, I think Oakley's a very pleasant fellow, and everybody knows he's a smart officer. But I want to talk to you a little about your father, you know. It was in the year——" And then the old fellow commenced a series of anecdotes, which might have gone on till next morning, had not L'Estrange, who saw Captain Oakley rising from a whist-table, suggested that it might be well to go and thank him for the offer of the passage, to which the Admiral replied, "By George, yes. You must settle with him at what hour you are to be off to-morrow; for he sails to-morrow, and I hope you'll have a good passage."


Thus released, L'Estrange went up to Captain Oakley, told him what the Admiral had communicated, and made his acknowledgments for the favour. Captain Oakley was a handsome bronzed seaman, frank and easy in his manners, with a prepossessing look. He seemed full of life and of zeal for the service.

"Well, I shall be very happy, you know," said he, "as you said you didn't care for fine accommodation. My little craft is French built, as you may guess from her name. Old Hawser took her. And these Frenchmen are not very liberal in the space they assign to their officers. You haven't much baggage, I suppose?"

"Two trunks and some small things."

"That's right. Well, have them at the Hard by noon to-morrow, and I'll take them and you off in my gig."

This was making matters very smooth. The Admiral hoped



that L'Estrange's son would come back again before long a field-officer, and that he might have the pleasure of again entertaining him. And thereupon adieux were said, and L'Estrange went to his hotel as light-hearted as it is possible for a love-sick young man to be.

Captain Oakley met him in the morning with as much civility as he had shown over-night.

"I have finished all my business on shore," said he, "but I can give you half an hour more if you want it."

"No, I am quite ready," L'Estrange answered.

"If that's the case, let's be off. So good-bye to Portsmouth for a while."

The boat's crew gave way. In a quarter of an hour they were alongside of the *Aiguille*, with her best scarlet side-ropes hanging to be grasped by her commander, a very small middy standing at the gangway, and her blue-peter flying from the fore.

"Is the pilot aboard?" was the first question asked by Captain Oakley after his foot touched the quarter-deck. He then desired his steward to see to the disposal of L'Estrange's baggage, and, turning to the latter, said, "I shall expect you to be my guest in the cabin at meals, and to make whatever other use you please of it. Let me introduce you to our doctor, who isn't specially busy when we are weighing; and then excuse me for a while, as I shall have a good deal to attend to. Doctor, let me have the pleasure of your company at dinner, to meet your new acquaintance." Thereupon Captain Oakley turned and addressed himself to his duties, while his gig was being swung up to her davits, and the ship was being cleared of idlers of both sexes, weeping Polls, Israelites, bummers, washerwomen, slopsellers, duns, relatives, and friends.

"Come with me and see your berth," said the doctor; "I'll introduce you to the gun-room mess when the bustle's over. Meanwhile, let me give you a hint or two as to how you may make yourself most comfortable in your little nook. Good sailor?"

"Only tolerable, so far as my experience has gone."

"Well, I'll keep an eye on you. We landed my few serious cases yesterday. Got nothing important at present, and don't expect to have on this short healthy voyage. By George, it's farther south, in the West Indies, or on the coast of Africa, that we get most to do in my department, always supposing that we don't have a brush with the enemy."

These remarks were broken by shouts of command from the deck, of "Bring him up, my boys;" "Captain of the fore-top,

ahoy;" and the notes of the boatswain's pipe; by sobs, wails, threats, and adieux from the sides; and at intervals by the rough voice of a quartermaster growling, "Damn you, why don't you shove off?"

When they were within the little cabin, L'Estrange asked the doctor in a low voice—

"Is there anything about which Captain Oakley is very particular? Most men have their fancies, we all know. I shouldn't like to do anything that might annoy him."

"No," answered the doctor. "I can't tell you of anything special. He isn't crotchety. Captain of his own ship, you know, and everything in the smartest order. Strict, but not severe. Quite a favourite with the crew; and we all find him affable and indulgent, though he is rigid on points of duty. Devilish fair, reasonable man."

"One sees that on a very short acquaintance with him."

"Wonder that it should be so, all the same, considering his training. You don't know his history, perhaps. Was in three or four different ships with Trigor."

"Trigor! why, that's the name of the Dynamite family."

"Just so. Trigor'll be an earl if he lives a few years longer and his imbecile brother doesn't. Very notorious character in our service the Honourable Tuke Trigor, I can tell you. Half fire-eater, half tyrant. Devilish difficult captain to sail with. Our chief the only man that could get on with him, and he was said to do so without forfeiting the goodwill of any man on board. But all that'll do to talk about some other time. I think you'll be snug here. Come, now, and take a glass of sherry."

CHAPTER X.

WHAT THEY SAID IN VEORSE.

No man probably ever left a better reputation behind him than Mr L'Estrange left in Veorse. Everybody regretted his departure, and wished him success in every way, especially in his professional career. The little town became very dull without him. The moderate gaieties, which were usually spread over many months, had been compressed into a brief period, in order that he might partake of them all; so society spent itself, and afterwards there was a great blank, which, if it was not

absolutely caused by Mr l'Estrange's absence, was coincident with that void, and associated with it in most minds. Many who regretted only the liveliness of the past weeks fancied that they were sorrowful because they should see his face again no more (for the present at least); and this was a much more creditable emotion to acknowledge than would have been lamentations for ended festivities.

Even the little lawyer, Mr Millis, had become an admirer of L'Estrange. Conceited and dictatorial as Millis naturally was, he was yet wise in his generation, and perceived the absurdity and general disadvantage of the position that he would occupy if he attempted to rival or in any way to discountenance a person who had so completely enslaved opinion, more especially if he should claim for himself any comprehension of military movements and matters while a soldier of some experience was on the spot. The odd mistake about L'Estrange's profession had, as Mr Millis saw by its rebound, greatly magnified the worship which Veorse tendered to the stranger. "To contend is useless," thought the astute aspirant to the long robe; "but our lucky acquaintance will not be here for ever, nor even for long. Whenever he may go, I shall, if I am discreet and patient now, recover my old superiority, and perhaps something more than that."

So Mr Millis executed with boldness and address a change of front such as men of greater renown have sometimes been unable to bend their natures to. Sir Robert Walpole, *teste* Macaulay, fell because he would not share his power with any one, high or low. Mr Millis stood and flourished because he allowed himself to be for the moment absorbed in the glory of a superior luminary. He stooped to conquer. He established a confederacy, and became a sort of junior partner in the great alliance of L'Estrange and Millis. He deferred to L'Estrange present, and quoted L'Estrange absent, and would have had men believe that the firm were very dear friends, who not only loved but esteemed each other. L'Estrange, being a good-natured fellow, did not repudiate this implied partnership, and did not snub Mr Millis, although he may have suspected the little man's admiration to be more politic than sincere. His own importance was what Mr Millis liked to have acknowledged; and half a loaf offered at that shrine was, in his opinion, better than no offering at all. A great authority has told us that "England does not like coalitions,"—a proposition which certainly will not be here objected to,—but for all that it must needs be that coalitions will come. They may not be desirable as the best that can happen; but, as a port in a storm, as the

alternative of something much worse, they may be welcome to the combining parties, if not to the general.

In saying that Mr Millis became kindly affectioned to L'Estrange, it was intended to show that the *amour propre* which had been most likely to be galled by the latter's turning up in Veorse had schooled itself, and looked charitably on him; how much more, then, would those *amours propres* whose withers were unwrung regard him with kindness! If L'Estrange's heart remained in Veorse after he himself went away (as some people have confidently affirmed that it did), it must have been intensely gratified by ascertaining the great quantity of kind regard, and the very small quantity of detractive *per contra*, which, standing to his account, remained there also.

Conversation turned frequently—exclusively almost—on him who had left them. "Such a pleasant companion; so well-bred and affable; they would feel his absence so much! But then he had his duties to attend to, and to follow his profession, which was the path of honour; and they could not expect, neither could they seriously wish (however friendship might selfishly desire to have him), to retain him among them. No; he was where he ought to be. They would not have held him back from the dangerous field, but they prayed Heaven to keep him from the evil."

When this was the strain in which acquaintances spoke to each other where special interest in the subject was not felt, one may be sure that any remarks let fall in the hearing of the Clowance family were of generous import, and that a good many remarks were let fall in that hearing. It was also a common practice to append to a complimentary notice, made in the hearing of one of the Clowances, a little rider intended to draw forth some declaration of the state and circumstances of the love affair; as, for instance, "Veorse seems a desert now, doesn't it? I couldn't have supposed that one person's absence could have made such a depressing change. And if we who are wholly unconnected with our esteemed young friend find his loss so lamentable, what must it be to you, whose relations with him are so much more intimate!" Or, "The regret no doubt is general, and I join in it with my whole heart; but my sympathy is not all with the absent. I can feel, too, for the sorrows of old and valued friends. My dears, you behave like heroines, though everybody knows what a trial this parting must be to your house. I don't see dear Miss Adair with you. I trust it is not indisposition which detains her at home."

But the Clowances, gentleman and ladies, were free from the

infirmity of that vain crow who let fall her piece of cheese at a call made in honeyed words. Of their Stilton—that is, of the exact state of relations between Doris and L'Estrange—they kept a fast hold, while they repaid only in kind the little vulpine charmings. They were firm friends of Mr l'Estrange, they said—indeed, it was through a service which he gallantly rendered to one of them that he first became known in the town. They were as sincere well-wishers of the young officer as any one in Veorse could be, but they claimed no exclusive or particular interest in his fortunes. When the gossips came to count up their takes, and to put them together and to compare them, they could establish nothing in the way of fact. And thus those were baffled who allowed any consideration to truth in matters of tittle-tattle. Yet there were a plenty who held discussion of their neighbours' affairs to be so essential that it was their duty, failing verified facts, to proceed on suppositions which, being made to take the place of truths, furnished good occasion for interchange of ideas. Their minds must have been congenial with that of the inventor of a rule in arithmetic which assumes a haphazard answer to the question proposed, and, by working on that, hopes to get at the true one—must have been congenial, that is, in all but the aim at ultimate truth, which was not a primary object with the gossips aforesaid.

And so in Mrs Clack's circle, after various inventions had been tried, and modified, and compared, and toned down, and dovetailed into one another, and smoothed and varnished, a very plausible tale at length appeared, and was told in several versions, according to the taste of the narrators. It was substantially laid down that Mr l'Estrange had in some way behaved very cavalierly: but whether he was already married; or whether he had said that his attentions to the family had been strangely misconstrued; or whether he had pleaded his inability to contract a marriage engagement at present, and given vague assurances of what he would do should he outlive the war, might be stated according to taste. "They are vastly dignified, that family," was Mrs Clack's declaration, "and they deserve better fortune; nevertheless, it is a fact that for two generations they have experienced treatment which the most undeserving would have found disparaging. I am very sorry for them; their fate makes one doubt the advantage of maintaining a high respectability."


Doris Adair was a courageous girl, who thought she felt sure of herself and of another. Her experience of the world had not taught her to despond; and the glory of her past

happiness seemed to encompass her still, maugre the fact that he from whom all that glory had emanated was now far away. Doris possessed what one of our poets has called a "fatal gift," namely, beauty. Doubtless the name was applied to it after due consideration; but, however fatal it may in the long-run prove itself to be, there is much reason to believe that it does not tend to make the youth of its possessor a particularly disagreeable period. It enlists the greater part of the world—or rather, the greater part of the world enlists itself—in its service. Its ways are prepared, and its paths made straight. It knows little of cold looks or of unkind treatment. It sees humanity in its most benignant aspect. And the goodwill of men seems to communicate itself to the elements and to the inanimate things of the world. Warmth, sunshine, good fortune, comfort, plenty—all incline towards beauty. The very axis of the earth is greased for it, so that it may feel no jar in the rotation!

This dream of being in a happy land, where care is unknown, may, as the sagacious reader will have already objected, be followed by a rude awakening to pain, or sorrow, or falsehood, or all together. Nobody wants to forget Elfrida, or Mary of Scotland, or Cleopatra,—the morals which they point, or the tales which they adorn. But all the tragedies that ever were acted upon the earth will fail to realise what sadness is in the heart of a fair young girl in health and strength. Experience alone will give meaning to the truth that we must eat our bread in sorrow.

Thus the charming Doris saw a rosy future before her. The wars would soon end; her lover would return glorious and safe; and then would commence the golden period which was destined for her. Such was the young girl's confidence in all going merrily, that she felt no real alarm when it was reported that a battle was imminent, or that some hindrance to the Marquis of Wellington's designs had untowardly got into the path. Happen what might, the news, as she felt sure, would on the whole be good, and the event would bring her felicity nearer.

And, as if to make Doris's sanguine outlook doubly sanguine, she had always near her an augur of good fortune in her aunt Una. Una, as every one acknowledged, was a most encouraging little person. She was not an enthusiast—her teachings might have been suspected if she had been so; but she was a quiet, imperturbable, small optimist, who had long ago done with doubts and fears, and had settled into a tranquil conviction of good. What she fed her hopes—or rather, maintained



her certainty—upon is not generally known ; and many there were who pitied her, and said she was living in a fool's paradise. If it were so, there was proof in Una's smooth brow, and calm untroubled eye, that a fool's paradise was not a bad place to be in. But somehow she did maintain a steady trust herself, and had the talent of communicating her faith to others. It is difficult to imagine how Una would have comported herself had she been informed that Captain Oakley was dead, or that he was married. Either announcement, one may suppose, would have deprived her of all hope, and driven her to utter misery. But then Una had not been tried in this way. Her confidence, if it might not seem to some observers over-reasonable, was at any rate not yet to be pronounced absurd. There be many who say that if you trust Fortune, she will take care of you. But it is not to be supposed that gentle Una entertained any such pagan notion as this. What she is more likely to have believed is that a doubtful matter may have a good as easily as an ill result ; and that it brightens the present, without adding to the darkness of the future, to expect a good issue as long as one reasonably can.

So Una and Doris kept up their spirits. Every now and then they got some little news of the persons concerning whom they were most solicitous. Mrs Stanshon, there is reason to believe, was the chief contributor ; but other people in Veorse got news and told it. Then they always managed to get the public accounts of what was doing in the services, though not, perhaps, until the accounts were a little elderly. Neither of them spoke much, except to the other, about the matter which lay nearest to her heart.

Miss Clowance had changed a little since we saw her last. She was not quite so bright or so even-spirited as had been her wont. Oftentimes she was melancholy and *distracted*. Gossiping people remarked that she began to show her age. The truth was that she was careworn with this love affair of Doris, which she still looked upon as the most cruel stroke of fate. If she had had an idea of L'Estrange being a military man, and, having that knowledge, had encouraged him to come about Doris's paths, she would have deserved the anxiety which she was suffering. But the wolf had come into the fold in sheep's clothing (that was Dorothy's severe way of looking at the case) ; she had not a chance of taking a precaution or of warding off the blow. Everything had conspired to bring about the very accident which she would with all her skill have averted. Through life her sympathies had been, not with those who whined about their inexorable evil fortune, but

with those who put a good face on their trials, and fought bravely their fight whatever it might be. Yet now she found herself, spite of her good sense and the wholesome maxims of her life, inclined to enter the complaining class, and to think about being the butt of Destiny. She was often ashamed of this inclination, but the consciousness that she was giving way to it against her better judgment increased her unhappiness.

It was very true that Miss Clowance herself had been most scandalously slighted in a matrimonial engagement, and that she had suffered the pain and annoyance therefrom which even the firmest persons cannot avoid feeling in such cases. It was true that her youngest sister's affections had been trifled with in an unwarrantable, unmanly manner. And, again, it was true that her niece was now embarked in an affair of the heart, which it was difficult to look upon as promising a happy result. Did this look like chance—all these blows of the same character, falling, one after another, on the same devoted family?

Eleanor was far less discontented. As regarded sentiment, she was as young as ever she had been; and she still liked a love affair none the worse because it promised some cross-chances, adventures, and trials of constancy. She would not take a worldly view of Doris's romance. She saw no reason why it should not turn out most felicitously. Other love stories may have been unfortunate, but why must this one be so? The probable truth was that Eleanor preferred even an unfortunate course of true love to no course at all. She did not, therefore, make herself unhappy over this one. Eleanor was as straight and cheerful and fresh as when we saw her last.

Had it been an affair of personal suffering, then surely Dorothy would have borne the trial patiently and bravely, while Eleanor would have been apt to give way. But this was a matter of speculation, at which Eleanor looked with something of the gambler's liking, while Dorothy loathed it as imprudent and unfortunate. Once more the gossips were to feast themselves upon an apparent slight to the house of Clowance—a house which had never angled for admiration or great connections, but whose moderation and propriety could not prevail against an adverse fate!

She who thinks herself happy, is happy. She who allows herself to believe that she is pursued by the Furies, cannot readily think herself happy. Is it, then, wise to indulge in ideas that the Furies are on our track, when it may be, in truth, that those powers are on an entirely different scent, and wondering perhaps at our presumption in supposing that they would give themselves any trouble, or that they could find any

sport in coursing, or stalking, or trapping such game as ourselves? There had been crosses in Miss Clowance's life; in whose life are there none? But really any impartial observer would have distinctly laid it down that she was not one of those who are particularly entitled to our pity. She had good health, a sound mind, a comfortable happy home, loving relations, and shoals of friends.

CHAPTER XL

ON BOARD OF THE AIGUILLE.

L'Estrange, being himself a man in authority, having soldiers under him, readily discovered how not to get in Captain Oakley's way. Consequently he found the said captain a kind and hearty man, exceedingly fond of his profession, and well informed concerning all warlike operations. When Captain Oakley saw that L'Estrange was a practical soldier, knowing a good deal of his work, and anxious to know a good deal more, the two became companions, which made the voyage short and pleasant to them. Oakley knew far more of the world and of war, but L'Estrange had something to tell him for all that. Oakley, on his part, was pleased to find a youngster who was ready to benefit by his experience.

They had a stiffish and not over favourable breeze to begin with—rather a trying start for the landsman; but the doctor came and looked after the young lobster, as he had promised to do, and got him on sea legs. After that, though the weather was fine, the winds were baffling, and they were several days getting out of the Channel, and running down the coast of France. L'Estrange noted with much interest the kindly feeling there was among all on board, the cheerfulness and jollity of the men, the absence of everything like squabbles and jealousies on the part of the officers, and the moral influence which the captain exerted. On two Sundays which he spent on board, the captain and he dined with the gun-room officers, and nothing could be better than the tone which prevailed there; the captain increasing the vivacity, and elevating the tone of the conversation, instead of being a "wet blanket," as is often the case when a great bashaw goes among his subordinates.

The doctor and L'Estrange were generally companions when the duties of the ship were being done, but Captain Oakley

himself, when disengaged, behaved always as an attentive host to L'Estrange. One evening, after they had got into more southern latitudes, these two were sitting together on the poop. Oakley, who had taken a liking to the young soldier, had become rather free with him, and had been recounting some reminiscences of the Honourable Tuke Trigor, with whom he had sailed so long.

"We were as near parted as possible," said Captain Oakley, "just at the commencement of our connection. I have often thought that what happened then was something more than ordinary accident. I, being then at Plymouth, had been ordered to join his ship, the *Sea-Calf*, which then lay at Portsmouth nearly ready for sea; and a pretty roasting I got from my former messmates, who swore that he was the greatest tartar in the service; that he flogged I don't know how many men a day; would press into the service any young man that he thought likely to be a smart seaman, even if he were a clergyman, and trusted to his powerful interest to pull him through with all his arbitrary doings; that he bullied his officers,—in short, that any officer having the misfortune to sail with him, had only a choice between being ruined by his tyranny, or hanged for complicity in his unlawful doings."

"A pleasant look-out!"

"Well, it wasn't pleasant; but it has always been my way to take what comes in the service and make the best of it; so I got on board a small craft that was starting for Portsmouth as speedily as I could, and was soon making my way up Channel with a fair wind. I ought not to have trusted the winds, but to have made a land journey, knowing how much promptitude counts for with a man like Trigor; but the saving of expense was an object, and when we started it really looked as if the sea voyage would have been a more expeditious way than the road. However, as ill-luck must have it, we soon encountered a change of weather and a gale, were in great danger, and got blown towards the French coast, where we could not run into port. It came out all right at last, as far as the ship and our lives were concerned; for the gale went down, and we reached our destination, but I was two days behind time.

"The delay did not trouble me much. If my berth was still open to me, things were as before; if I had been superseded, it was by no fault of my own, and I had escaped from what was by all accounts not a paradise. So I went to report myself at the Admiral's office with a very composed spirit, produced my orders, and explained that I had been out in the late gale, and so had got behind time. The officer to whom I made my report,

said, after reading my orders, that I was very unfortunate, for the Admiral, who remembered me somewhere or other, was very unwilling to have me superseded, and fought hard against it; but Captain Trigor, who was all but ready for sea, had represented that there was much just then to be done in the North Sea, to which the Sea-Calf was going, and every half-hour's delay was a loss of so much glory and prize-money. At last the Admiral had consented to an officer, who was on the spot, being appointed, and I should have to wait for another turn.

"Humph! I grunted despondingly; for you see, despite the indifference on which I had just been congratulating myself, and which on reflection I am sure that I should have felt, it *was* annoying to have been out in such infernal weather, been in danger of my life, and after all to have just missed my mark. 'There are not many men,' went on the official, 'who would much mind being shared out of a berth on board the Sea-Calf just now; but if you have a fancy for her, get aboard as quick as you can. As I said, you were only superseded last night; Captain Trigor may have slept ashore, and so not have seen the new lieutenant, in which case he may not consider your place to have been filled up. If so, I'm sure there'll be no difficulty with the Admiral, who is disposed to be your friend. It's a mere chance; but you may think it worth trying.' I thanked him, and was off. Boarding the Sea-Calf, I was soon told that the captain was aboard, also that she had her complement of officers, which information seemed to settle my fate as to that appointment. One of the officers asked me to go below and take some refreshment, which I did, and we chatted a little, but very little, for we were disturbed by a bustle of some kind, and told that the captain was on deck, and not in his best of moods. I told my entertainer that I had always wished to see this redoubted chief, and I thought I would go up and look at him. 'Well, do if you like,' said he, 'but excuse *me*: I shan't put myself in his way without reason, especially if he's out of sorts.' So I went on deck alone.

"I should tell you that the Honourable Tuke Trigor was a young, active, and most impetuous man; that though a rigid formalist when it suited him, he would do things very unceremoniously when his humour pointed that way. On the occasion in question, he had come on deck in some hurry which had taken him to go on shore. Either he had forgotten something, or a new idea had seized him, to which he wanted to give effect immediately. Probably he thought that he had ordered his gig, but he had really not done so; and when I got sight of him, he was storming because it wasn't ready. 'Then, sir,' I heard him

saying to an unfortunate officer who stood near him, 'if you haven't thought proper to do it before, look sharp now, will you?' The officer began to apologise and explain. 'Damn it, sir,' said Trigor, 'don't talk; I want to go ashore.'

"Now it happened that the unlucky officer was no other than he who filled my place. He had been greatly impressed by what he had heard of Captain Trigor's character, was in mighty awe of him, and now on their first *rencontre* had had the misfortune to misunderstand him. The Captain's peremptory style made him quite lose his head, and instead of hoisting out the gig smartly, he stood looking about him, and turning from one rigid figure to another (for everybody near Trigor was like a statue) with quite a helpless look. I pitied him, I assure you; and knowing that Trigor's wrath might leave a mark on him for life, I, feeling quite cool, as I didn't belong to the ship, went up to the wrathful Captain, and said, 'If you'll allow me, sir, I'll get your gig out.' The answer I got was, 'For God's sake do, sir!' In a few seconds she was alongside, and I reported accordingly. 'Thank you, sir,' said he; 'but who the devil are you? I don't know you.' It was only when his choler began to subside that he had woke up to the fact of my being a stranger. I told him my name, and said I was the officer who had been superseded the evening before. 'Can't stay to talk now, sir,' said he; 'but be good enough not to leave the ship till I come on board again. I don't mean to be long ashore.'

"I went back to finish my glass of wine. Captain Trigor kept his word, for in what seemed to me a very short time he was alongside once more, but evidently in a changed mood, for he came back with the observance of every ceremony, and passed to his cabin without saying half-a-dozen words. I thought he had forgotten me altogether, and said something about leaving my address and going ashore. But every one present dissuaded me from this, saying that he very seldom forgot anything in the way of an engagement, and I had better have a little patience. They were right. A sealed letter was shortly after handed to me, which everybody requested me to open at once. It contained a notification that, as I had joined my ship in sufficient time for proceeding to sea in her, the appointment had been ordered by the Admiral to stand good, and the provisional appointment of Lieutenant So-and-so (I forget the poor devil's name) was cancelled. Thus did I come under Trigor's command. I followed him from ship to ship (for he was always changing to a better command), became his first lieutenant, didn't find him the pleasantest man in the world,

but managed to get along with him, and made a friend of him."

"A powerful friend, too, I should think."

A powerful friend, if only he would be moderate. But he knows only one way of doing things, and asks favours as if he were giving orders on his quarter-deck. And the more zealous his advocacy, the more offensive he manages to make it, so that he often defeats his own object. Men in office don't like to be bullied into doing even what they may think not unreasonable."

"He has some good points in his character, then?"

"Good points! The man is as brave as a lion. I'll tell you some day how he put down a general mutiny with his single arm, and by his coolness and contempt of danger; but that would be another story, too long to be told now. His bitterest enemies cannot deny him courage of the highest kind. His ship is always in the very first order. He can do a generous act as well as any one living, and he isn't selfish in the narrowest sense of the word."

"Then how has he earned such a terrible name?"

"I think he wants some natural perception—sees things differently from other men. Doesn't intend to be harsh and tyrannical. Would probably be surprised to hear that he is considered so. He's an undeniable tartar for all that. We once took for a short voyage on duty a man who is now rising to great reputation in your service, with his staff. He and Trigor are, I believe, nearly connected. He said to me in his short, decided way one day, 'Order of the ship is perfect; quite a model. Don't think an improvement could be suggested; and as for the crew, they are the finest, smartest set of tars I ever saw. But there's one thing that has struck me, sir—struck me unpleasantly: I haven't seen a man smile since I came on board.' But we might go on for hours on one subject if I were to tell all the stories I know about Trigor. Now tell me something about yourself. You have been wounded. How long have you been at home?"

"I was about six months in England. Got rather badly shot at Salamanca."

"Hah! you were there, eh? And in what part of the country have you been staying? I mean, where do your friends live?"

"Friends in the sense of relations are scarce with me now. My parents are dead. I am an only child. And the family, I may say, has no headquarters."

"I can sympathise with you as you have no home to go to."

"Are you also without kindred?"

"No, not without. But I have managed to fall out with some that I have, and so to be as badly off as if I had none. But never mind about that. And how did you manage to pass your time?"

"Why, I remained in town till the doctors would condescend to part with me; and then I went down into the Furze Range to join a party of surveyors, and get some facility in hill-sketching. A knowledge of it may help a man in the army."

"The Furze Range! I should know something about that region. Whereabouts did you stay?"

"Well, not far from Growcester. I was in some country places called Mathwick and Veorse."

"Damn it, that's my native place! Only fancy! Did you ever meet a Mrs Stanshon there?"

"Mrs Stanshon; of course. Why, I am in the same regiment as Major Stanshon."

"You don't say so? How odd! Suppose I were to tell you that Mrs Stanshon is my sister. She is, poor thing. And I have not set eyes on her for seven years or so, and I can't say but it has been my own fault."

"I remember now to have heard Mrs Stanshon once say that she had a brother in the navy, but I did not take much notice at the time. And so you are a native of the Furze Range? It interests me much to hear that. I have pleasant recollections of some parts of it, especially of Veorse."

"Know a clergyman there called Clowance—friend of my sister's?"

"Certainly, I know Mr Clowance. Why, it was through a little accident that befell one of his sisters that I began my acquaintance with the Veorse people."

"Accident! To which of his sisters?"

"It was nothing serious; but Miss Una was the sister."

"Una! damn it; don't tell me so. What was it?"

"She fell into the water at Olden's bridge at a time when the stream was deep. I was fortunately close there sketching, and able to extricate her immediately. No harm was done."

"Dear little Una! I remember her as soft and as fresh as a May morning. Changed now, of course."

"Well, I should think not greatly, for that is much the way in which I should have described her to you now. She is very fresh, sweet-tempered, and tender-looking; and she must be a healthy girl too, for though she was never in much danger of drowning, it was a cruelly cold day when she fell in, and it was a long time before she got dry clothes. Yet she did not suffer at all from the ducking. I never heard that even her nerves

were the least affected. I saw her in dry garments in less than an hour after the accident, and her colour was as steady, and her look as serene, as if nothing had happened."

"By George! And Una isn't at all *passée*? Ever remark what pretty little feet and hands she has?"

"I have often admired them. Indeed, I have admired all that belongs to her. I wonder that she is still a demoiselle. But I once heard, though I heeded the story but little, that there is some old attachment or other which makes her hard-hearted."

"Ah!" said Oakley, with a long sigh. "It may have been so, indeed. Pretty Una! But, now, I have never asked about her sisters. She used to have two. Stiffish old girls."

"I don't like to hear you speak of them in that way, because I feel very friendly towards them, and owe them a great deal of kindness. They are still alive; and, to all appearance, hearty. Miss Eleanor, when her back is toward you, might pass for three-and-twenty."

"Bless 'em, I didn't mean to speak unkindly of 'em, poor things; not I. No, no, damme, I wouldn't say an unkind word of them! Gentlewomen, eh? Gentlewomen, every inch?"

"Quite so. Though they evidently are not rich, they have all the air of people of condition."

"And ought to be rich, only they had hard usage. Belong to the Deane family. Cruelly treated in more ways than one by an old rascal—no, by a damned old fool—of a baronet. And you don't think the bloom is off little Una? She was a dainty little body once, I can tell you."

"She is a dainty little body now, I can tell you. The gentlest being in the world. She has only to make it known that her vow, or embargo, or whatever it is, has been taken off, and a dozen swains would be at her feet."

"So, so, indeed! Why, I begin to fancy, L'Estrange, that you have been hit yourself from that quarter."

"Well, no. You are mistaken, I assure you. It might have been so, I own, under other circumstances, but my heart is secured elsewhere."

"Aha, that's the way, is it! And to fancy Una being run after! Pretty little Una! And so you are in my brother-in-law's regiment. I daresay you know Stanshon better than I do; but I always thought him a kind, liberal fellow."

"He is all that, and a thorough soldier to boot. He has been kind to me personally, and I share largely in the general sentiment, which is very warm towards him."

"Ah, that's right! I'm devilish glad to hear it. Hope that he and I will grasp each other's hands again some day."

"Why, you will not be so far from the army when you are at Oporto. Why not run across to wherever we are, and see how he does? You will then be able to make a report of his condition to Mrs Stanshon, and see for yourself how we live under Lord Wellington. I suppose you are not required to be always on board."

"Beg pardon. I wasn't attending. Something you said set me musing. And besides that, I suppose I am tired, for it's getting late. What do you say? Shall we have a sip of grog, and then turn in?"

CHAPTER XII

CAMPAIGNING IN SPAIN.

Not many days after the conversation took place which has been recorded in the preceding chapter, the Aiguille was at anchor in the Bay of Oporto, and L'Estrange and his naval friends were about to part. He had made himself very agreeable in the ship, and so received a kind farewell from all. Captain Oakley's adieu was particularly hearty. He said that L'Estrange had enlivened his voyage, that he trusted they would meet again before long, and that if ever he could have an opportunity of serving L'Estrange or any friend of his, he should be delighted.

"We shall fight our way to the Spanish coast some day, and then you must come and stay with the regiment," L'Estrange answered.

"I may be on my way to Calcutta by that time," answered Oakley; "but let's hope for the best. Good-luck to you. Good-bye."

L'Estrange had to make his way to the army under some difficulties, but these did not lead to any particular adventure. The journey was tedious, but the end which crowned it was a happy meeting with his old comrades.

When an army is working to such purpose as did that which was commanded by Lord Wellington, he who returns to it after an absence of several months will be sure to note many changes, and to have much to learn concerning his friends and associates. Deaths, wounds, captures, sicknesses, reinforcements, had occurred in plenty during such active warfare; and hundreds of adventures, crowded out of the historian's pages, but more

interesting than history to one who has lived among the actors and shared their hard couches, their hard fare, and their hard knocks, had to be told on bivouacs and by watch-fires. Those were accounted for who were not forthcoming to speak for themselves; and those who could speak for themselves could also speak of themselves. For on such service every man's experience is a little romance—an episode in the great epic that is being acted.

"Is old Braddell in camp? I think I hear his jolly laugh not far off. Always merriment where he is."

"No, you don't. Braddell laughed his last more than a fortnight since. Miserable affair; small brush; but we lost Braddell and half-a-dozen men."

"Poor Braddell! And I heard in England of Ponder having been taken by the enemy. Seems to have been a stupid business; not like him."

"Not a stupid business at all, though most unfairly reported as such, as Ponder himself may tell you before the stars are down. He made his escape most cleverly and pluckily. A picket of ours came upon him half starved and almost naked, after he had got away and been ten days in the fields and woods, and brought him in. Devil of a dance he had; but he's sleek and saucy again."

"Glad of that, by George. And what's become of that little girlish fellow that joined us just before Salamanca? 'Missy' we used to call him; don't you remember? I didn't think he'd ever stand the life."

"That little girlish fellow—you mean Cruise—is as brown as a berry now, and as hard as nails. Got no end of credit for the way in which he extricated a detachment which was assailed by a superior force. He isn't called 'Missy' now."

"Well, tell me something more. I can't think of everything at a moment. You must have endless news."

"I daresay I have; but it doesn't all occur at once. You'll have it bit by bit. By the by, I do remember something that it won't delight you to hear."

"Eh! what's that?"

"The Spalpeen has got into serious trouble."

"The Spalpeen! Well, I am sorry. What was it?"

"Colonel thought he could trust him with a service of danger. There he was quite right; for, as you know, Pat is game for anything. But he also thought he could rely on him to literally obey orders where fighting was concerned. There he was wrong."

"What was it? I am concerned for the Spalpeen."

"It was this: We were bringing up a large and important convoy, and had got along very well to a certain point, when we found suddenly that we were close upon the enemy's outposts. The armies lay so close together all the winter, that, in an ordinary way, it was a common thing for advanced parties to get sight of each other, both sides having to show themselves now and then when eager in search of information or commodities, or, it may be, of pleasure. But this was no ordinary occasion; we were engaged in a very serious business indeed, and the sight of an enemy's force so near was disquieting. The Commander-in-chief, who seems to look out for everything, must have known of their being astir in the direction where we then were, for he had ordered a battery of artillery which lay on our route to come on with us until our road led away from the front again."

"Had he, indeed! Nothing seems to escape him. Nothing is too little or too big for him."

"Extraordinary man, truly. Well, the battery joined us, and, as I was saying, we were soon aware that the enemy was unpleasantly near, and in such force that, if they understood what we were about, things might be embarrassing for us, and the train which we were escorting (some of it was money) be in serious danger. It was presumable that the French were on some expedition of their own, and as little anxious to come in our way as we to come in theirs. On the other hand, they might have heard of the duty we were on, and be smelling after our stores. So we had need to be circumspect."

"It was the day after the artillery joined us, and we found, to our annoyance, that we were getting abreast of larger parties of the enemy as we went along. There were hills to shelter us, and so far it was probable the French were not aware of our neighbourhood. A very critical part of the march was coming. A bit of comparatively open ground had to be crossed to reach a bridge. If there were a look-out of the enemy on the hills, he would be certain to discover us there, and he would certainly do more or less damage to our waggons in the passage of the river. Once over the stream, the advantage would be on our side. We could make good the bridge against odds, and give time for the carts to make way along the road. A mounted officer had already gone forward to call the attention of some Spanish troops, who lay a few miles farther on, and it was probable that they would be up in an hour or two, and so insure the safety of our charge if it had once passed the bridge."

"How to cross the river unobserved was the problem. Our Colonel thought that not only must we refrain from anything

which might attract the enemy's attention, but we must even be at some pains to keep him off the ridges, if his occasions should be taking him that way. Now there was a certain path by which, if he mounted the ridge above us at all, he would be pretty sure to pass: if we could from that pass lead him in some other direction, he might never see our train at all until it should be too late to do it mischief.

"After pondering this matter patiently, the Colonel thought it would be advisable to place a party in this pass, who might appear to be foraging, or out after some casual object. In case of the enemy coming that way the party were to draw off, keeping out of musket-shot, and to lead him in a direction behind the hills, whence neither the plain nor the bridge could be seen. The ultimate retreat of Pat's party was to be by a route to the bridge which had been discovered, or by a ford farther up stream. Of course there was a chance of its being cut off, supposing the French to be aware of what was going on, which we rather thought they were not. They had no cavalry, and Pat's talent was to be shown in manœuvring with infantry."

"I don't know how that would suit Pat without a brush of some sort."

"Well, he took up his ground very cleverly, and the Colonel, who had ridden to a height from whence he could see him begin his task, thought that he was doing marvellously well. He had been seen by the enemy, as was expected, and had commenced to retire with much discretion; whereupon the Colonel, feeling satisfied, began to move his charge towards the river. Fortune favoured us at first; but when we had some half of the train over, unluckily we heard a shot from Pat's direction, then another, then a thickening fire, and presently it was to be surmised that Pat was engaged with some five hundred men."

"The deuce!"

"'By the Lord, he's fighting,' sung out the Colonel; 'and we're in a nice mess. If I detach men for his support, and we should be then attacked, we shall hardly be strong enough to beat off a large force; and I don't know how to leave him to his fate, the blundering villain!' Ultimately Stanshon started with a strong force to his support; but, from the very nature of our design, it was a long way round the hills to where the scrimmage was in progress, and it is a question whether he could have arrived in time to more than bring off the Spalpeen's remains. But the artillery now galloped to the crest of the hills above, and came into action opportunely, so as effectually to check the pressure on Pat. The artillery shots set more of the enemy's

troops in motion with the view of cutting off the guns, and it seems that, at one time, a combat of some magnitude was imminent."

"Nice mess."

"Devilish nice. But a mounted officer soon reached the Spalpeen, and desired him to draw off his party on the first opportunity; and this recalled him to a sense of his indiscretion. Stanshon's force was seen by different parties of the enemy, and believed by one portion to be supporting the guns, and by the other to be the main body, of which they had engaged the advanced post. There was a hesitation among the French about advancing, and the Spalpeen took advantage of it to fall back upon his supports. The artillery thereupon limbered up and withdrew, and, save that there had been a few casualties on both sides, things returned to the state in which they had been in the morning. Meanwhile the carts were over the bridge."

"What had the Spalpeen to say?"

"Well, precious little, and nothing to the purposa. After he had retreated four or five times from point to point, the enemy reckoning that nothing very serious was going to happen, some of them halted by a stream, took off their shakos, and began to refresh themselves. This being, as he said, an act of 'contempt,' he thought he would give them a shot to 'spoil their devarasion.' Whereupon not only did the soldiers fired at return the fire, but others from whom his attention had been diverted while he was molesting the first, came round a turn in the path within musket-range. He had to draw off fighting, and might soon have found himself baffled at that work, had not the guns, as he said, 'come beautifully into action at the right moment,' which he appeared to think the most natural occurrence in the world, instead of a fortunate accident."

"And what has happened to him since?"

"Nothing in the way of punishment, but Pat is evidently in disgrace. The General of the division made a lot of inquiry, and was very disagreeable about it; and our Colonel was greatly chagrined, though he spoke but little. He told the Spalpeen that he would take care how he trusted him again—that he had had a capital chance, and had made a bad use of it. So Pat is down on his luck."

Pat, or *the Spalpeen*, was a lieutenant of about L'Estrange's age and standing—a young man whose only objection to the military life was that there were such a damned lot of precautions and doublings, which seemed invented only to balk men when they were eager for a fight, and that one could so seldom

get the privilege of going right at his enemy and hitting him on the head. Mr Perrin,—that was his name,—though fond of strife in a general way, and always blundering into scrapes, was to his friends one of the best-natured and attached creatures in the world. He and L'Estrange, though unlike in many points of character, had always been fast allies. It was really disagreeable news that he had got into trouble.

"Ah, L'Estrange, me boy, is it yourself come back? Oh, thin, but I'm right glad to see ye! And it takes something entirely delightful to make me glad now, I can tell ye; for oh, darlin', it's a broken-hearted man that I am."

"You don't look it, at any rate, Pat; and I hope it's only one of your jokes. You're going to astonish me with something funny."

"Broken-hearted and disolate. Sorry a joke I'm giving ye. Sure me riputation's tarnished, me career's cut short, and me grey hair'll come down to a nameless grave."

"You'll break a hundred heads before your own gets grey. I heard the tale of your mishap. You couldn't come in without potting something, and raised a shindy which was near being a battle. Was the Colonel very hard on you?"

"No, me boy, he was not, and that's a large part of me discomposure. If he'd dropped upon me hot, and had it out, I've maybe the spirit to resint a ballyraggin', and keep me heart up against that same. But, L'Estrange darlin', he was as gintle as a lamb; said he was disappointed in me, that was all; and it's the tinderness that breaks me down entirely."

"Don't fret yourself, Pat. It'll be forgotten presently, and you'll have opportunities of establishing your character anew."

"Ye see it's of no use arguing with principalities and powers, however right ye may feel yourself to have been; and if I'd got only the rating that many a man 'ould have given me for his own mistake, I'd have thought the account settled neatly between us. But when he was so mild and gintlemanly, I felt meself sadly cast down. Though I did no wrong, not the least in life, yet I'm conscious that, as things go in this world, I might have met with worse usage. If ever the chance does come, L'Estrange, I'll repay him; see if I don't."

The upshot of which rather unhinged reasoning was, as L'Estrange thought, that Pat, although in his outer or everyday conscience he could not see an error in anything that led to speedy and plentiful fighting, yet, somewhere in his inner nature, was dimly aware that his indulgence in fighting on the occasion in question had been disobedient and dangerous, that he had been very leniently dealt with, and that he was

dying for an opportunity of showing himself in a better light than he had then appeared in. L'Estrange's return was calculated to have great effect in doing away with the Spalpeen's heaviness.

Not the least pleased of those who welcomed the young man back to his duty was Major Stanshon. How he drank in all he had to say about his wife and friends at Veorse! It was so strange that the young man, when going after his sketching, should have lighted on the very place where Mrs Stanshon was living. Strange it was, too, that Oakley, his own brother-in-law, should have been the captain of the ship which brought the young man back! The Major, however, by a cautious question or two, ascertained that L'Estrange knew nothing of Oakley's ill-behaviour to Una.

On the other hand, L'Estrange, far from wishing for concealment in anything, was congratulating himself on having rejoined a friend to whom he could confide his love story, and to whom he could now and then talk freely of Doris. He hoped, too, that, as long as he might be with headquarters, he might always get, through the Major, some notice of how the Clowance family were doing.

Major Stanshon remembered Doris Adair only as a child who promised to be good-looking. But he readily believed that she was now the beauty that L'Estrange represented her to be. He was not himself a native of the Furze Range; but he had been at Veorse, and knew the esteem in which the Clowance family was there held. It was this knowledge, and perhaps knowledge of another matter which came nearer to his wife and himself, which caused him to say—

"Are you thoroughly in earnest, my lad?"

"In earnest, certainly!" answered L'Estrange.

"Well, don't fancy that I want to offend you; but you know that our profession has not the best reputation in the world for constancy, especially in little heart affairs that arise out of short sojourns in country towns. What I wish to follow up that question about being in earnest with is this. From the terms on which the family insisted on your leaving the case, you are perfectly free to put an end to your suit if you wish it. You have now been tried by absence and change, and ought to have some knowledge of the strength of your affection. If you doubt its endurance, you should at once make the poor girl understand that everything is at an end between you. To keep her faithful to an engagement which is not likely to result in marriage, would be cruel and dishonourable. On the other hand, if you feel that this is an enduring attachment,

determine that nothing shall ever make you fall away from what you have promised."

"If I know myself at all," answered L'Estrange, "I am sincere and unchanging in this."

"That being understood," returned the Major, "I will do all I can to keep you informed of the course of things at Veorse, and ask that every one of my wife's letters shall contain some mention of Miss Doris Adair."

It was not long, however, that L'Estrange remained employed in his regimental duties. The army was engaged in those operations which ended in the battle of Vittoria. Hill-sketching was much in demand; and an officer who had been practising it at home according to the most approved methods, though for ever so short a time, was soon seized upon by the Quartermaster-General's department, where he made himself very useful. A few days, however, before the great battle with King Joseph, he came in and took his place in his company.

It was well known some time before Vittoria was fought, that a great battle *somewhere* had become a matter of certainty. Where it might take place was not so easy to predict. In this respect of having been expected it differs from Salamanca, which occurred when one side at least was little desirous of a conflict except at great advantage. The generals at Salamanca were trying to out-manceuvre one another, and, by all accounts, the Frenchman was getting rather the best of the game. Carried away by his eagerness to win at this trial of skill, and perhaps thinking too slightly of his adversary, the French leader committed an error which gave to Lord Wellington the great advantage above spoken of as the condition on which he would at that time be willing to fight. Wellington, watching the movements of the two armies, was on a hill, on and around which his army was moving, the French army being on a neighbouring range of heights. He observed that one of the French divisions was, while endeavouring to obtain some advantage of situation, so far separated from the rest of the army that it might be attacked and overwhelmed before support could reach it. The opportunity did not admit of much reflection, because the error would probably be repaired immediately. Deciding on the instant, Lord Wellington ordered some of his regiments off the hill and into the interval between the French forces, and had a division ready to meet in front the troops thus cut off. So he invited a battle, the result of which brought to nought all the manœuvring which had been the object of emulation up to that point. But it was different at Vittoria.

Vittoria was seen to be coming. King Joseph, whose eye was not so well accustomed as his brother's to take the measure of fields, had managed to get his army, with an immense quantity of baggage, much too closely packed on a splendid plain near Vittoria, which was watered by rivers and shut in by hills. He went on with this crowding until he had made the plain a sort of pen. Collected there was the luggage not only of the army now present, but that of other French armies now in Spain, that containing the stores withdrawn from French magazines which had to be evacuated, and that carrying the household stuff of the fugitive French, from King Joseph himself downward; several depots of garrison artillery were in the basin; the King's treasure also was there in waggons. There was room enough for the army to lie there quietly, but not room for it to move without its parts coming in the way one of another, and not a possibility of it hastily moving *off* without much confusion; that is to say, there was no easy line of retreat open to it, and, if any disaster should come, there must be a dreadful scramble to get away.

CHAPTER XIII.

VITTORIA.

The English, Spanish, and Portuguese armies were on the other side of the mountains, outside of the basin which contained Joseph's forces. The King, as it was said, found a difficulty in making up his mind to anything; therefore it may be wrong to say that he had determined to fight a battle on this ground. What, however, he could not decide for himself, circumstances appeared to have decided for him; he had waited too long, and was too much encumbered, to be able to decline the engagement, and when he found Wellington to be close to him, and seeking him, there was no alternative but to put the battle in array, and wish for a favourable issue.

Wellington had taken the measure of the King as a military commander. He treated him with less respect than he would have shown to the least honourable of the Emperor's generals. He ventured to divide his army into three, and to make three separate attacks, the three assailing bodies being but loosely connected,—that is to say, having very little power of support.

ing each other. Had the King known his work, he, being at the centre of the position, while his adversary was on the circumference, would have managed so to mass his troops as to bring an overwhelming attack upon one of Wellington's three *corps d'armée*, crushed that, and then proceeded to deal with the remainder—would, indeed, have resorted to the very tactics which his opponent had pursued with advantage at Salamanca. But such a taking of opportunity by the hair was beyond—far beyond—him. He made no sign of being able to comprehend, far less of being able to control, the hurly-burly which reigned that day on the plain of Vittoria; and he amply justified Wellington's estimate of him, and his manner of dealing with him.

The right corps of the allied English, Spanish, and Portuguese army advanced to seize the mountain which bounded the basin on the south. The centre corps, under Wellington in person, dashed through some mountain-passes on to the field, and then by several bridges across a river to assail the main body of the French in front. The left corps wound round the outside of the mountain on the north, and came face to face with a French corps, which under General Reille defended the line of the river near to, and north of, the city of Vittoria. It is with this third corps that our narrative is chiefly concerned, as with it marched L'Estrange's regiment.

The regiment was not with one of the leading brigades. The march was six or seven miles to where the enemy was in position, and as the business to be first done was to seize different bridges and fords, which business did not admit of being done on one extended front, the columns became engaged successively as they came up.

As they marched along behind the hill, the sounds of Wellington's battle on the other side were heard loud and constant. Both sides were strong in artillery, and the discharges to those at a little distance were like the roll of continuous thunder. The Peninsular soldier was, however, well accustomed to such sounds, and of this uproar L'Estrange and those about him only remarked that it was greater than ordinary. It was not until they began to discern the smoke, and to hear the distant reports caused by those of their own corps who had preceded them, that they felt much excitement.

The brigade was halted for a brief period after the march behind some rising ground, and while it rested, there came pouring by some English troops who were complaining loudly that the Spaniards had not supported them, or they could have made good their hold on one of the bridges, and on a village beyond. As it was, they had been beaten back after once

driving the French from the bridge. They rallied and reformed behind the newly-arrived brigade, and reported that the French were fighting like devils. There is no doubt that the enemy *was* fighting well. If the King was incompetent to exercise the chief command, each of the generals under him was well able to do the subordinate duty allotted to him.

They had not much more than got their breath after the march, when the order was given to advance. The men who had been "standing easy" (which attitude was one very liberally understood by them) were in their places, silent and attentive, as it were instantaneously; such was the habit of rapidly falling into the order of march which long experience in the field had given them. In five minutes they were within range of the enemy's guns. Fortunately, there were but four in action at that point, but these, as they sent forth their shot with a rapid fire, tore the ranks cruelly. Men fell in swarths like the grass, as bullet after bullet smote the column; but how the wounded were cared for, or whether they were cared for, no sound man could see or ascertain; for it was the duty of all who were still able to close up their ranks, and move forward with perfect steadiness, "forgetting those things which were behind." And this duty the Peninsular veterans had learned to perform, if ever troops acquired such learning. No sight, or sound, or accident of war could shake them, or create the slightest pause in their onset.

Compact and silent, they moved on with even step until they were nearly within the range of the musketry which was rattling from the farther bank of the river. Then a portion of the brigade was ordered to take ground to its right, and to keep down the fire of the musketeers, while another portion on the left took possession of some ruined buildings, and likewise exchanged their fire with the enemy across the stream. L'Estrange's regiment received orders to take the bridge. As their Colonel, after setting them in array, placed himself at their head to lead them on, three poor fellows were felled by the same shot, and one of them fell across the path of L'Estrange, who was on the reverse flank of his company. The youth could not help shuddering at the dreadful wound which he saw; but he stepped resolutely over the fallen man, and ordered his ranks to close up.

They were now feeling a storm of musket balls, which seemed to fall like rain before the whirlwind, and which created the feeling that nothing could stand where they were and live. Yet not only did a goodly array survive, but these pressed forward more and more eagerly against the horrid fire. Many a

seasoned soldier rolled over under that leaden tempest; and many a hardy fellow, smitten but not wholly disabled, went on with the bullet in his flesh, postponing surgery until after the bridge should be won. But now the musketry of the allies from the bank behind them had begun to tell. The fire of the French abated somewhat. Following their gallant leader, the regiment rushed on to the bridge. It was a hand-to-hand struggle in front; but where L'Estrange was he could see nothing,—he only knew that they were bearing onwards, and giving to the column that weight which, as it was hoped, would force the Frenchmen from the bridge. But the enemy knew somewhat of this kind of work as well as we.

The mass of men heaved and oscillated, were swayed this way and that, as the struggle in front inclined. Nothing could be seen of what was doing at the head of the regiment, but the shouting was incessant. Either the English were falling fast in front, or the enemy was yielding ground a little; for every now and then L'Estrange and those about him were able to advance a few paces suddenly. After one of these plunges forward, they came upon the ruins of what had been an exterminated barrier, put up that morning, and destroyed in the first attack, for this bridge had been taken and lost again already that day. As thus, at irregular intervals of time, they moved along, the dead lay thicker and thicker. They were in such masses in places that the advancing column had no choice but to tread on them; and from time to time a groan or an appeal heard above the din of battle told that some of the fallen were still alive.

But forward was the word—forward with a stern determination. They made a little more way, and now they were evidently close to some serious obstacle, for the men immediately before were seen scrambling along the parapets of the bridge; there was a pause in the centre of the column, and over the heads of the men immediately in front it could be perceived that there was a clear space of more or less magnitude just ahead. When L'Estrange came up with this obstacle, it was seen to be an officer's charger lying across the way, and rolling in the agonies of death. The poor animal left scarce any room to pass, and the men had been put to their shifts to avoid his hoofs. L'Estrange knew the horse. It was Major Stanshon's. Where was the owner? The young man showed a soldier where to pass his bayonet into the poor brute's spine so as to end his sufferings; the carcase was then drawn to one side, and the column passed on.

It might have been some two minutes after this that a shout

from the troops who were firing from the bank behind told of some favourable occurrence, and presently four field guns, which either had just come up or had taken a more favourable position, opened upon the French, and, it is to be supposed, staggered them sensibly. For now the advance was more rapid, the assailants pressed on, conscious that some change was occurring in front, and then, on a sudden, everything seemed to give way, and the gallant regiment poured through like an avalanche on to the farther bank.

A village, with straggling houses, faced the river. The French having been borne back, were for the most part rallying behind the buildings. L'Estrange's Colonel was seen on horse-back re-forming his men on a broader front to take the village.

As the companies were passing each other to get into their new order, L'Estrange was for a moment near the Spalpeen. That youth seemed thoroughly to have yielded himself up to the enjoyment of the hour. He was bleeding from a wound in his neck, and his sword was bloody from hilt to point, but Pat himself was radiant, and had the air of a man revelling in healthful sport.

"Freddy, me boy, isn't it beautiful?" said the Spalpeen. "Be J——, I sthuck a few of thim divils."

"But you are wounded, Pat."

"This! oh, it's only a crack; divil an inconvanience even. On we go; there'll be more——"

The two young men were parted before L'Estrange could hear the end of Pat's remark. And now the advance was again sounded, and the regiment moved forward once more and assaulted the village, and drove the enemy out of it.

But it has been said that the French general at that point was a tried soldier. He was not likely to be utterly disconcerted, because one out of many bridges which he was defending that day had been carried by the allies. His eyes were everywhere over the whole field, and already he was taking steps to repair this mischief. He ordered up a strong force from his reserves, and he placed twelve guns in a position which he had noted as one that would be commanding if ever the allied troops should force their way across by the bridge which he had just lost.

The allied troops in that part were holding the village, and a portion of them had moved to the left of it with a view of assisting other attacks farther up the river, when all at once they were plunged into by the French guns, which took them obliquely so as to tear their ranks most ruinously; and before it could be judged how this unexpected assault should be met, a

French column containing several brigades was seen close to them. With the column alone they might have had some chance—at any rate, they would have had a fight; but to check the head of a heavy column with musketry while they were being mown down by guns, every shot from which told heavily, was more than human nature was equal to. With a pang, as he looked at the position which his people had won so gallantly, and at such a cost, the Colonel of L'Estrange's regiment gave the word to retire from their advanced position, but to hold the village. This, however, was, under the circumstances, not so easy to do. The houses afforded some shelter from the crushing artillery fire; but in seeking the shelter, the regiment was more or less broken into sections, and lost the confidence which is felt when British soldiers are standing shoulder to shoulder. Scarcely had they dispersed themselves among the houses, when the heavy column of which they were already aware was seen by the officers, who were on the look-out, to be steadily approaching, and making straight for the bridge, not apparently caring at present to wrangle for the village.

The effect of the French seizing the bridge would be that all the allies who had crossed would be cut off from their supports, unless they could force their way back, or their friends could force a way to them, which might be a long business. Therefore, while the French column was yet a little way off, the English regiment was ordered to recross the bridge, which it did in great haste and broken order, the guns again punishing the men fearfully as they rushed back. The work was all to do again.

Indeed, the French general in that part of the field did his duty loyally and manfully on that day. He knew very well that, encumbered as the King's army was, it would have no chance of retreating with even the semblance of order unless he could keep open for it a great causeway leading from Vittoria to the coast. He held the line of the river with its bridges and fords. He knew the country on which the fighting was sure to take place, while the allies did not know it, but nevertheless had to fight their way into it. He disposed his troops so that he could readily bring a preponderating force to any point of his position. This was what he had just now done to get rid of the attack in which L'Estrange took part, and what he had done before that day. In clearing one part of the field of enemies, he weakened the defence at another; and of his doing so the allies took advantage to take another bridge or a ford. But he brought back his power and overwhelmed them again; and so he continued baffling attack after attack as long as his

countrymen under the King maintained their ground on their field of battle. After the most soldierlike fight which was made by any French general on that day, he drew off his tired divisions in tolerable order, giving up the river line only after the King had been so thoroughly beaten that English troops from Wellington's corps were available to come up through Vittoria and assail him in flank. By that time the battle was hopelessly lost, and, with his honour safe, if he had little else left, he drew off the remains of his divisions.

But before the enemy thus made way for them, L'Estrange's regiment had plenty of work to do. They scrambled back in some fashion to the bank of the river which the allies held, and then retired to some cover to re-form. During their retreat L'Estrange was pushed against another officer, in whom he had the pleasure of recognising Major Stanshon, apparently quite sound.

"Poor Mulock," said he, "fell when we were nearly across. I don't know where he was struck, but it was evidently a disabling as well as a painful wound. I was obliged to leave him and go on, as we were within a few paces of the enemy."

"Well, I'm glad to see you safe."

"Thanks; I'm safe enough. I wish as much could be said for that mad fellow Perrin. He was severely wounded in the village just now, but I think they managed to bring him off."

"We shall be minus a smart fellow for the rest of this day's work; that everybody who knows Pat will acknowledge."

"Ah, yes. But there are plenty of smart hands left; and I hope we may yet do work to-day which shall be remembered."

It is certain that they *did* do a great deal of valuable work, and that they suffered severely in doing it; for they engaged the attention of the right wing of the French army, while Wellington was driving back its centre, and Hill was turning its left flank; but they had on that occasion the bad luck which often enough falls to the lot of devoted soldiers. For Graham's corps had not the brilliant merit of making the enemy to whom it was opposed turn and flee, although it certainly contributed as much to the glory of the day as did those regiments which drove back King Joseph's main body from position to position, until it at last left the field in not very orderly retreat.

After being disappointed at the bridges, L'Estrange's regiment took some little time to rally and re-form. During this interval the sounds of the battle which had been raging six or seven miles off rolled perceptibly nearer, and showed that the French were being beaten back towards Vittoria, though they were still obstinately fighting. The regiment had not, however,

to assail the bridge again, but were ordered away to another part of the field to drive the French from a village which they had seized on our side of the river. This service, after much toil and bloodshed, they at last performed; but when it was achieved, the allies were supreme only on their own bank of the river. On the far side the gallant Frenchman was still holding his own, neither could our people get over in such masses as would enable them to array an effectual force on that bank.

The sun was getting low, and the leaders on both sides were beginning to calculate for how much longer this equal contest could be maintained. The sounds of the main battle had been for some time drawing nearer, but beyond this there was nothing to show how the fight was going, when suddenly they were aware of some cavalry coming up from the direction of Vittoria, and making for the flank of the French. There could be but one inference from this. The main body of Joseph's army had been beaten, and allied troops were now available to crush the gallant corps which had all day been doing so loyally its duty. The leader of that gallant corps knew of the danger before the English general, he having, no doubt, been informed of the King's inability to hold his ground; accordingly, he had already been preparing to draw off his troops, when the cavalry of the allied army was descried.

New life was now given to the whole of Graham's corps. They forgot their fatigues, and the many wearing reverses which they had endured that day; and with the certainty of victory, dashed across the bridges and fords, and possessed themselves of the left bank of the river. It was now General Reille's turn to withdraw, and like a tried soldier he made his retreat, suffering greatly, yet preserving a military order. His cavalry met the allied squadrons which had been seen coming from Vittoria, and held them for a time in check. A reserve of infantry, which he had kept in hand all day, was ordered up, and bore the brunt of the pursuit, while his tired battalions from the river's bank withdrew rapidly along the roads. For hours they retreated fighting, but at length they reached comparative safety for themselves at the expense of all their baggage and stores.

Indeed, the whole of the artillery and baggage of the French army, as well as the property which has been mentioned as belonging to fugitive French civilians, had to be abandoned. The fugitives themselves, who had collected in Vittoria, reduced to utter despair by the defeat, gave voice to their misery, and augmented the huge legacy of suffering which the battle had

left. Joseph and his people got their lives for a prey—nothing else. It is questionable whether his troops carried away with them even one meal.

The battle was over; the first hot pursuit was over; and the regiment, not even now at rest, was making for the spot on which it was to bivouac that night. On the line of their march was a place where four ways met on an open plain. The sun was down; but the light, after that midsummer day of toil and glory, was still bright upon the earth.

It was while they were passing this place that L'Estrange saw a sight which astonished him, and the circumstances of which he could not have believed to be possible. It was said above that all King Joseph's trains were shut in the basin, as well as his soldiers. When, therefore, he retreated in disorder, his money had no better fate than his ration casks or his entrenching tools. All together got jammed in the narrow roads. But the Spaniards from the surrounding villages were immediately on the ground when they saw that fighting was over, and that a hurried retreat, or rather a rout, was in progress, which might yield a fine opportunity for camp-followers, after the two armies should have passed on.

The Spaniards had, it appeared, recognised the treasure-carts, had seized and got them off the roads, and were now busily engaged in plundering their contents. The cases had been broken open, and coins literally covered the ground "thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks in Vallombrosa." What it so surprised L'Estrange to see was the, as it appeared, sea of coins—a quantity such as he had never before seen, and never lived to see again. He was astonished to observe the readiness with which the Spaniards found means of taking the treasure away—carts, barrows, mules; and even in the field, with so many stern realities to engage his mind, he could not help thinking for a moment of Ali Baba's return from the robbers' cave. There seemed to be fortunes for all; but what more than anything excited his astonishment and indignation was to see officers in red coats,—British officers,—who had left their ranks, and were filling their pockets, haversacks, and even their hats, with the money. He could hardly believe his eyes; but he recognised, engaged in this degrading occupation, more than one officer whom he knew. Whether or not they succeeded in making away with their plunder he never discovered, as he had to pass rapidly.

While regarding this scramble for the money, he could not help seeing that a great deal of it was seized upon by a large party of peasants, who seemed to have come prepared, and in

some order, to remove the spoil. This party worked under the direction of leaders, and the leaders were all controlled by an active woman, who came on to the field on horseback, and had the whole party at her command. She was young, or she seemed to be so, and L'Estrange saw that she was good-looking. But who the deuce could she be? He had some idea that she was not altogether unknown to him; but he had not much time to recollect who she might be. What an expedition for a female of that age to come on! What a strange thing, that where people in general were like mad beings gathering each for himself, this fair creature should be able to make a gang of men calmly do her bidding, and collect treasure for her!

The glimpse of this curious transaction was lost almost as soon as seen, and the regiment marched forward to its goal. The day of Vittoria was the last day of King Joseph's reign in Spain. He was now a fugitive, and few of the French could be thought much better than fugitives. A force, however, collected at San Sebastian, and formed a garrison for that place; there was on the east coast still an army under General Suchet; and Napoleon sent that great soldier, Marshal Soult, into Spain to endeavour to collect the fragments which had been scattered by the unskilfulness of his brother. The hold of the French on the Peninsula was now but weak; yet the Emperor was determined not to relinquish it as long as a struggle was possible. But he could furnish no reinforcement, as he required all the men he could muster to maintain himself on the Elbe, where he was wearily manœuvring preparatory to that fearful three days' agony under the walls of Leipzig, which was the beginning of the end of the Empire.

It astonished many that, after such a crushing defeat as that of Vittoria, there should remain in Spain any French force deserving the name of an army. Nevertheless, an army did remain, and it has been amply explained how this was the case. First, the battle of Vittoria was lost because the general was incapable, not because the forces were unworthy or utterly insufficient; and when Joseph withdrew himself into France, the generals who commanded divisions, feeling themselves free to act with vigour and discretion, began immediately, notwithstanding the forlornness of their plight, to put a better face on things. Secondly, between the allied army and France lay the formidable Pyrenees, a region where such a leader as Joseph would probably not have dared to make head; or, if he had resisted, would have come to speedy destruction for want of the experience, vigilance, alacrity, and rapid decision which are

necessary to conduct a mountain campaign against such a foe as Wellington. But under a warrior like Soult it was different. The Pyrenees became a formidable barrier, offering one more chance for victory. Thirdly, Great Britain had neglected her own interests, and while her soldiers were doing marvels on land, had not thought it worth her while to keep an adequate naval force in the Bay of Biscay. The consequence was, that the French had often a better command of the sea than we had; and thus it came about that, if a fugitive French force could only make its way to the coast, it could by sea escape from a position of extreme peril to another position where it could be not only comparatively secure, but capable of showing a front once more. It was thus that fragments, which must have been destroyed or surrendered if we had provided ships to oversee all the ports, and scare away French vessels, were able to reunite and prolong the war.

Neither was it only in neglecting to maintain an adequate naval guard force that Great Britain failed to do herself justice. Our troops could not take San Sebastian at first because they had not been supplied in time with the necessary ordnance; and the siege was suspended for a month while they waited for stores and artillery to prosecute the attack. Moreover, while we were besieging the place by land, it received succour from France by sea,—a fact not very creditable to the Power which boasts of owning the finest navy in the world.

It was shown, in describing the contest for the bridges, that L'Estrange's regiment suffered severely. It was their lot to do so during the whole day. Their loss in men was over 200; and, of course, this could not be without proportional casualties among the officers. The Colonel was badly wounded; so were five other officers. Three were killed, two of whom were captains. By consequence, L'Estrange and another subaltern were promoted to the rank of captain, and the Spalpeen was left at the head of the list of subalterns, he not having succumbed to his wounds, nor having been so dangerously wounded as had appeared to Major Stanshon to be the case. The exploits of the regiment were duly celebrated in the despatch announcing the victory, and when the rewards of the several corps were announced from England, it was found that the Colonel was presented with a decoration, and that Major Stanshon was raised to the brevet rank of lieutenant-colonel.

Fighting, like fortune, seems to attach itself to particular regiments. Those who have had the hottest of what has passed seem to cut in for the hottest of what is to come; and there was some warm work in store for L'Estrange and his comrades.

Immediately after the battle Graham invested San Sebastian, near to which fortress the regiment remained until August. A fortnight would probably have sufficed for taking the place, had the authorities at home done their duty in regard to the war.

CHAPTER XIV.

BEFORE SAN SEBASTIAN.

The ground assigned to L'Estrange's—*Captain* L'Estrange's—regiment was on the right bank of the river Urumea, which skirts the fortress of San Sebastian. There were small cottages and other buildings scattered about their station; the greater part of the regiment was encamped; but some few officers, of whom L'Estrange was one, were accommodated in the small buildings. Men in such situations are thankful to have roofs over them, and are not over-exacting as to the fittings. L'Estrange's quarter appeared to have been a small grocery warehouse. You could smell coffee in some corners of it, and a few aromatic odours besides; but, except in these corners, all minor perfumes were overpowered by the flavours of strong cheese and garlic. It is astonishing how a campaign hardens one to these little offences, and with what equanimity one jests about an annoyance which in softer days would be intolerable. When Pistol declared that he was "qualmish at the smell of leek," he meant simply an insult to Fluellen—nothing more. A man—a Pistol even—who had made the Agincourt campaign, would have ceased to be qualmish at the smell of anything.

The English army had, by dint of mere will, been doing marvellous things. They had contended with, and overcome, difficulties in such startling ways that they began to believe there were no such things as impossibilities to brave men, and that every obstacle must go down before determination such as theirs. Hence, when it was manifest that San Sebastian had been manned and armed, and provisioned by sea, because we had not cruisers there to scare away the French ships; also that, according to the ordinary rules of war, it would take time now, and require a heavy armament (which we had not got), to reduce it speedily,—the army began to think that they would have it speedily nevertheless. It would cost them a good many lives perhaps, but they would have it. And this

idea of overbearing all things by mere dogged volition was not confined to the men in the ranks; men who ought to have known better were believers in it, men in high command.

The great commander, who was the main cause that his troops believed themselves able to do anything they pleased, was by no means one to make light of difficulties, although he was in the habit of overcoming them. He never failed to consider, and to assign its just weight to, every circumstance that affected his undertakings. Where he saw that an enterprise was, considering the means at his disposal, unduly hazardous, no man could more sternly avert his eyes from it, however glittering it might seem, and no man could more patiently abide the coming of a more propitious season. He was an eminently prudent man, and his prudence was one main cause of his success. Yet that very success had inspired his army with hot-headed rashness, which, when he was not present to control them, sometimes had too much way, and led to disastrous consequences.

Wellington had in hand many operations, of which the siege of San Sebastian was one. He could not direct the siege in person, but he had given his approval to a method of attack which would have required some time, but which was, with his great deficiency of means, the only one likely to be crowned with success. But his plan was too slow for some of the ardent spirits on the spot; they thought they could be masters of San Sebastian by a much shorter way than he had decided to be necessary.

San Sebastian stands on a promontory which is connected by a narrow isthmus with the mainland. On one side of the promontory runs the Urumea, a tidal river; the other side is washed by the sea. The English attacked from the farther bank of the Urumea and from the isthmus.

It had been intended to proceed step by step; to ruin first the outermost line of defence; to secure that, and from thence to assail the next inner line, so advancing until the position should have been reached from which, according to military authorities, it is proper to assault the body of the place. But it had been found practicable to breach, from a considerable distance off, the body of the place at an exposed point; and the general on the spot fancied that his troops could make their way past the outworks to that breach, and so into the town, although these formidable outworks were still nearly entire. In the attempt he lost more than five hundred officers and men! He failed; and he had now before him a harder task than that which confronted him at the beginning of the siege. And it

was soon apparent that for the present no progress at all could be made with the siege, because a supply of ammunition and an addition to the battering-train, which ought to have been sent from England, had not arrived. So, while these stores were waited for, the siege was turned into a blockade.

L'Estrange was not engaged in the unfortunate assault. His regiment was employed on other duties. The Spalpeen had offered himself as a volunteer, but his services were not accepted: first, because volunteers were not called for; and second, because Lieutenant Perrin was still more or less disabled by his wounds, and not thought to be in condition for the desperate service of mounting a breach. Furiously did Pat chafe at this. He said they were all in a conspiracy against him, and determined that he should not win a reputation. He and L'Estrange were on duty on the isthmus during the dark hours in which the desperate assault was being enacted. They were listening to the sounds that came from afar, and trying to divine what stages of the attack the sounds indicated, Pat between whiles returning to his grievance, and expatiating on the great opportunities of which he was forbidden to avail himself.

"There now, be the powers, they see them from the horn-work. That rattle of the small arms is the first compliment in this delicate little reception. Arrah, now, they're gettin' it. Lucky boys! Oh, begorra, but it's me heart that must break!"

"There, there, Pat! That I'm sure's the artillery from the castle. It looks along the whole line of the brave fellows' march. By Jove, it must be hot work!"

"Yia, and this is cowld work. Have ye a drop of anything about ye, L'Estrange? Me flask's impty. Holy Moses! did ye hear that shout? The boys are on the brache, or they're clearing some obsthruction. There again! Oh, but it's maddenin'! And there another! Go it, ye divils! Men'll be fallin' like nine-pins, and here are we, bedad, not even allowed to look at it."

"Well, we're allowed to listen to it. I can't think what that noise could have been. They can hardly have reached the breach. I think they must be returning the fire of the horn-work; but that's of no use,—there's nothing for the leaders to do but to be moving on."

"Sure, I forgot to drink, I was so startled by the shouting. Here's——; but what's the use of drinking luck? there's no such thing for poor divils like us. The luck's with the bowld boys that ye hear cheerin' that way. Ah, yes, shout away! Let thim laugh that win."

"I trust they will win. But there have been ugly sayings about to-day. The Engineers don't half like hastening the assault, and there are some who don't hesitate to say that it's dead against Lord Wellington's instructions."

"No doubt it is. Sure it's ivery thing that's improper, and insubordinate, and perverse, and malignant. Do ye think, now, that minds conscious only of right would have vintured to trate anny gintleman as I was trated when I proposed to join the column of attack?"

"Look at that light on the sky, Pat; what the devil can it mean?"

"Sure I can't tell. They're throwing light balls, perhaps."

"No, no. We should see them on their course. It must be the town that's on fire."

"Then, instead of our going in, the Frinch'll be coming out. It'll be divil take the hindmost."

"Only for the poor creatures of inhabitants. The fire will hardly affect the garrison. All the troops——"

"Divil in h——! Whatever was that?"

The besiegers had sprung their great mine, and the noise was as though the heaven and earth would mingle. How the awful sound raised itself, as it were, into the sky, and then rolled away, starting in secondary bursts as it was reverberated from peak to peak of the Pyrenees!

"Wasn't it a roarer, then?" exclaimed Lieutenant Perrin, as soon as he had recovered from the stunning effect. "Thunder and blazes is nothing to that. If I could only have been prisint at th' explosion, now!"

"You might have been *absent* a second after it. From the tremendous report, I am sure it was an overcharged mine; such are very uncertain, and, without good management, may lift friends as readily as foes."

"There's the shoutin' again. Don't ye hear it ringing along again in the wind?"

"I do. The work's not done yet."

"Done! no. They'll keep up the ball till after daylight, ye may be sure."

"They can't keep it up after the river has risen to half tide, or there will be no getting back for our people. They must win now, or give it up by sunrise."

"They'll not give it up. They'll get in. D'ye hear that shout again? I'd give the revarsionary interest in all me patri-monial estates to be in that fight. Oh, Jupither!"

It was not until they got back to their quarters that they heard of the unfortunate result of the storm.

"The General deserves no pity," said the Spalpeen. "He might have had me there. He daren't say he wasn't asked."

Well, the siege was all over for the present. They were only keeping their siege works in repair, and shutting in the enemy. Pat and L'Estrange, who had been moved on to the isthmus at the time of the assault, were now back again to their old quarters, with comparatively little to do. The weather was blazing hot, and those who were off duty were glad in the day-time to get some shelter from the sun. L'Estrange was in the hut alone, enjoying half an hour's solitude in which he might think over matters which took his mind a long way from the towers and trenches of San Sebastian. He had heard from Colonel Stanahon some tidings from the Furze Range, and was picturing to himself Doris Adair in her delight at hearing of his promotion. It was beginning to be dreamed of that this dreadful war might ere long reach its end. The French were wellnigh driven out of Spain, and did not seem able to maintain a force there any longer. It was presumable that they were not very strong in any part of Europe; and that, in a little while, unless fortune should turn again greatly in their favour, they might be glad to leave the nations at peace, and to enjoy repose themselves.

"If that time should come," thought L'Estrange, "I have something better than peace and rest in store for me. Oh, what a happy day it will be when I can enter once more the well-remembered house at Veorse, and claim sweet Doris for my own! No more war; no more parting; no more waiting; all going merrily." And he saw in vision the happy circle, imagined the observations that might be made by the old aunts, the sly looks of pretty Una, and Doris all his own. It was a delicious reverie.

"Hollo, L'Estrange! Where are ye, me boy? Guess now who I've brought to see ye?" (Pat's grammar was not always accurate.) "Sure, I met him making his inquiries, and 'twas lucky, and remarkable too, that he should have addressd himself to me of all men, since I knew where to put me hand upon ye."

During this address L'Estrange was reluctantly waking from his delightful dream, and, if truth must be told, not blessing, but contrariwise, Lieutenant Perrin in his heart. He roused himself a little, and stared lazily about to discover what it was that the Spalpeen was announcing. Doing so, he caught sight of an epaulet on a blue coat, a brown cocked-hat (formerly black) a little above the epaulet, and between the two a bronzed face, the features of which were not unfamiliar

He rose up with an uncertain smile on his lips, as if to meet some indifferent comer; but in an instant his eyes sparkled, and he rushed forward, exclaiming—

“Captain Oakley, is it really you! I am heartily glad to see you.”

“How d’ye do, L’Estrange—*Captain* l’Estrange (allow me to congratulate you)! Well, the army is pretty near to the coast now; the Aiguille is once more in the bay, and so, according to promise, I’ve come to look you up.”

“And right welcome you are. You seem to have already made acquaintance with my friend Perrin; but let me make you formally known to each other. Lieutenant Perrin—Captain Oakley.”

“Odd now, that of all the men and officers in this camp ye should have asked directions of me, and I the man that could tell ye best all about your friend L’Estrange.”

“Well, not so curious if all the circumstances are considered,” said Oakley, smiling. “I had been told to look for him in this neighbourhood; I came hither, happened to strike on the very house which I was seeking, and, not supernaturally, encountered one of its inhabitants coming towards it.”

“Is that the way ye explain it away! Then I see ye’ve no belief in fate, or chance, or destinies. I have, and my luck’s damned bad.”

“Sorry to hear it. But these are times when one’s luck is always changing. The loser of to-day may be a big winner to-morrow.”

“Of course he may. What the devil am I thinking of to be bothering ye with me lamentations! I know what it is. There’s something wrong in the digestive organs—that is to say, they’re mighty impty. What do ye say now, Captain Oakley, shall we look down towards the mess-tent and refresh?”

“Anything you please, but it isn’t eight bells yet—I should say it isn’t noon—I forgot that I was on shore—and I can’t say that I’m hungry.”

“I’m afraid they’ll have nothing hot for an hour or so,” said L’Estrange; “so, if you are not hungry, don’t spoil your luncheon by swallowing cold beef, or something of that sort. We can give you a glass of wine and a biscuit here, and we shall find something to talk of till the food’s ready.”

“Well, if I may propose,” said Oakley, “you shall take me out, *malgré* the heat, and show me something of what was done in the siege. We can talk as we move about. I must be on board again in the evening; so, if I am to see anything of your trenches, and so on, it must be now.”

"Certainly. I will accompany you with pleasure. Let us have the glass of wine, and then to the works."

It was nigh three months since L'Estrange had parted from Oakley at Oporto. The latter had been since that time in the North Sea on some special mission, had returned to Portsmouth, and, a small instalment of Wellington's demand for the siege having been got ready, had been ordered to bring it on as an earnest that the remainder would follow some day. He told his adventures as they sipped their wine, and afterwards as they strolled towards the siege works.

"And you were all through the day of Vittoria, you lucky fellow," said Oakley. "You've got Salamanca and Vittoria, those two splendid fights, to your credit; and you'll have more before long, for Wellington is not the man to let his people lie idle. For my part, I see no prospect except fetching and carrying. There's little or no active work for the navy."

"There *was* a plenty," answered L'Estrange, "and you were lucky enough to cut in for some of the most glorious of it."

"Ye were speaking of Willington," said Perrin; "sure if ye'd come yesterday instead of to-day ye might have seen him, for he was over here to look about him, and probably to consider how he'd arrange his next attack."

"One is always glad to see such a man as that, and I should have been glad to have come while he was here. But I have seen him, though at a time when his fame was less than it is now."

"Ah, ye've seen him?"

"He and his staff made a voyage in a ship of which I was first lieutenant, and for a few days I saw a good deal of him. Trigor, who was then my captain, through his great connections, managed to carry about a great many men of note."

"What! 's that th' owld tartar and fire-eater that flogs the last man off the yard, and grills his officers in the galley to let 'em know what the next world'll be like?"

"I fancy we're speaking of the same man," answered Oakley, "but your idea of him isn't quite correct. Captain Trigor is not old, and though he sometimes makes this world a little unpleasant to officers, I never knew him give any hint about the next."

"Oh, of course not. Sure, I was only repeating some nonsense I heard in one place and another. I daresay he's a very nice young man."

The hill overlooks
 much damage to it.
 CHAPTER
 AN INTERVAL
 Fancy our
 thirteen hundred yards'

"Well, you perceive," said
 near the siege works. The
 cer's depot was in that hollow. A few English cruisers
 be there again when the battle was the almost assistance. The
 were the commissariat and their wounded by sea, and to
 our trenches; but before we could armament from France
 and look at the fortress.
 rapidly the meaning of our already paying dearly for

"Ah! here we are at
 they gained the crest of the hill. It was a mistake
 lent. Now we shall be at such a long way to go to
 Below them was a broad valley. We have got along faster and with
 that the banks were unbroken. Our way."
 yond the farther bank, we had to do these things in the
 a long promontory, bordering the sea. The highest point of which people don't

seaward end; where the narrow isthmus; at least it is thought
 was a narrow isthmus, leading from here."
 tioned, was the castle, and the victory may be to
 the citadel and the fort, and the victory may be to
 the promontory—least they hold that, pro-

town was a strong point, and men and sufficient means,
 across the river, and must be successful, and
 part was thus cut off. It must be successful, and
 looking from the fort, we could see our talk!"

work with long guns. They require
 From the fort, we could see our talk!"
 be seen from the fort, we could see our talk!"
 cation with the fort, we could see our talk!"
 the defenders, we could see our talk!"

"Where was the business, first and last?"

"Between the fort and the sthorm," said Perrin, "and

"You know the robbers. What the devil now!"

"Yes."

"Then, but

it from here. The heaviest
 were 24-pounders—mere pop-guns beside the

"Yes."

Consolidated by a mass of earth, it cannot be breached
 strewn near enough to see it over this mass.

Sure they don't think we're worth tons of iron, when we come out only to take a sthrole for iexercise and devarsion."

Pat's remark was caused by a shell thrown from the castle, which struck the ground not far from where they stood, and immediately after exploded, its fragments flying about their ears, and the sand being sent over them in a shower.

"They can't believe in such things as coming on a guileless errand," said L'Estrange, "and so they've sent a gentle hint that our longer presence isn't desired. Well, they allowed us to con over the general aspect of things, and I suppose we need give them no further trouble in warning us off. There will be something to eat ready by the time we get back."

Half-a-dozen steps took them off the crest of the hill and under cover of it. The French did not fire again, although Mr Perrin, after having retired a few paces, turned round, exclaimed, "Sure, I've as good a right there as they have," and returned to the top of the ridge, where he performed a lilt, or some other *pas seul*, shaking his fist at the castle, and using a variety of insulting gestures. He failed to draw a shot, and came away uttering dreadful words of defiance, which were audible to none but his two companions.

They were soon back at the camp. Oakley made the acquaintance of more officers in the mess-tent, and they had a lively meal, though the provisions were not of the most delicate order. When it was over, L'Estrange took Oakley aside and said, "What about Stanshon? he can't be far away. Would you like to see him?"

"Indeed I should," answered Oakley. "He and I were always friends. My sister and I have had some little misunderstanding; but I shall be heartily glad to shake Stanshon's hand if he doesn't object."

"Will you come with me, or shall I go and tell him you are here?"

"You had better tell him, perhaps. I will then accompany you if he cares to see me."

"My sins are of old standing now," thought Oakley; "he will hardly show resentment so long after, and in a foreign land." And he moved restlessly about until presently he saw L'Estrange returning accompanied by a war-worn figure, with grizzled locks hanging below his cap, in whom he had some difficulty in recognising his brother-in-law.

"Ah, Felix," said Colonel Stanshon, coming up, "give me your hand. How glad I am to see you again! You have changed very little, considering the time. I recognise your features perfectly."

"I recall you, face and figure and all, now," said Oakley, returning the Colonel's hearty grasp. "I didn't when you first hove in sight. Why, all your campaigning hasn't rounded your back. You are as erect as ever."

"No, no, my boy; the best of me is all gone. I shall never be again the man that you remember me. But never mind, I have something to show for my worn-out vigour; and, thank God, here I stand to give account of myself, which is more than can be said of many and many a better man."

"Your friends think you very well worth preserving," Oakley said. "Well, and have you heard lately from Constance? Poor Constance!"

The story does not require that all that passed between the brothers-in-law should be here recorded. They spent an hour in a conversation that was very interesting to both of them. And after they were satisfied with their private chat, they joined L'Estrange again, and went, in the cool of the afternoon, to look at everything about the camp. Before parting with Oakley, the two soldiers promised to go on board of the Aiguille next day, and to take with them Lieutenant Perrin, if that gentleman did not happen to be otherwise engaged. And the visit was made and very much enjoyed by all the visitors, who found even a ship a luxurious place in comparison of their camp, and were regaled with fare which, though not very sumptuous, was far better than they were able to procure on shore. The conversation was chiefly concerning public events. Oakley told the latest news that he had been able to learn at home, and delighted them by repeating the general opinion that the allies on the Elbe were holding their own against Napoleon, and that it was now considered possible that he might experience reverses.

"At any rate," observed Colonel Stanshon, "they may balk him of any further success. In the position in which he now is, not to win is to lose."

"Probably it is," answered Oakley; "his army are said to have eaten up all the fruits of the country about the Elbe, and to be deteriorating."

"He is not likely to be able to raise a third host if he dissipates this one," said Stanshon; "and in the meantime he can have no soldier to spare."

"You mean that he cannot replace any of those who have been lately lost here in Spain."

"Just so. And if Marshal Soult is left with only the forces now at his disposal, our chief will clear the Peninsula of everything French as surely as we sit here."

"I wonder how Boney's people felt when they heard about Vittoria?" said the Spalpeen. "Divilish quare, I'm thinking."

"The news is understood to have caused much depression among them, and to have correspondingly encouraged the Germans and Russians. And all they are likely to hear from this part of the world will only increase these effects. The fall of this place, when it happens, will have great significance to both sides."

Oakley announced that his stores were nearly landed, and that he should be leaving in a few days for England. He would be glad, he said, to carry home anything which they might wish to send. In case of his returning to the Spanish coast, he would bring whatever they might commission him to procure; at any rate, he would arrange to have their requirements attended to by the vessels which would bring the stores, even though the Aiguille should be despatched in another direction.

Now these offers of service led to important consequences.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

The officers were all landed soon after sunset. One of them, Mr Perrin, was for night duty, and the other two thought it well to be early within the lines, as alarms had been frequent of late. Perrin went off to equip himself for his work; but L'Estrange strolled with Colonel Stanshon towards his (the latter's) quarters, enjoying the fine evening, and consulting about some souvenir which he proposed to send, not to Doris, but to her aunts, in the Aiguille.

"I think you may, certainly," the Colonel was saying. "I will contrive that my wife shall present it, and report to me how it is received. Oakley will forward it to her. I am afraid he will not go to Veorse himself, at least not at present, or we might have got news of them at first-hand. He will be there again some day if he lives, I am convinced. He is a good fellow, and an excellent officer."

"He is. I was quite sorry to part with him."

"And I am afraid that I hurried you away; but I had some reason for doing so."

"What, anything astir?"

"I don't know that there is; but I thought it not unlikely that we might hear of something to-night."

"You have got some intelligence?"

"Well, I have got intelligence which does not amount to much in itself, but out of which some more may arise. You look puzzled; but I am mysterious only because I am doubtful whether what I know ought to be passed about camp."

"Oh, I see."

"Yet it was given to me without any injunction of secrecy, and as you are a discreet man, and not likely to run up and down publishing it, I may take you into my confidence, and then you will judge for yourself whether it means anything."

"As you please, Colonel."

"It is this. An officer commanding one of the guards informed me this morning that he had passed on to the General a person bearing a safe-conduct from the Commander-in-chief. He happens to know that from this person most important information has before been received; he thinks, therefore, that this visit may be the prelude to some sudden enterprise."

"Likely enough, by Jove. I have no doubt there is something up. Do you know whether it was a foreigner or an Englishman that cautioned the General?"

"I do not know the nationality of the informant, but I do know that it was not an Englishman or a *man* of any nation. The most profound secrets are fathomed by petticoats. It was a woman that came mysteriously into camp, and hence it has been concluded that some information of more than ordinary importance has been given."

"If it is trustworthy, we may no doubt have something to animate us; but these intelligence people often carry tales to both sides, get money in both palms, and, after all, do not reveal anything of moment."

"That is true. Remember, however, that my informant reported this to be a woman who had been known on former occasions to make important disclosures."

"Well, we shall see."

And it being now as dark as it was likely to be that summer's night, the two officers went their several ways, L'Estrange going off towards his own quarters. Having arrived there, he found the building quite dark, and wondered that Pat, when he went forth, had not left a light burning. However, there was a tinder-box in his own apartment, and he knew where to put his hand on it.

"How's this? My door fast!" said he. "Are you inside, Finnis? What the devil's the matter, eh?"

Not the voice of Finnis, his attendant, but a much gentler voice, answered from within.

"I am here. Are you quite alone? If so, I will open."

"You! And who the dence are *you*?" answered the officer. "I should advise you certainly to let me in without delay, or you may be disagreeable for you."

"Tell me," asked the voice; "are you quite alone?"

"Alone or not, I advise you to open the door," answered L'Estrange. "I'll have a file of the guard here in two minutes, and then we'll see."

"No; don't raise an alarm. I have not the least wish to keep you out; on the contrary, I must speak with you. Only I dread to be seen by any one but yourself."

Campaigning makes men habitually cautious. It was easy for L'Estrange to say that he was alone. But there might be more persons within than the one who spoke. It would have been awkward to have two or three men pounce upon him. So he said—

"Listen now, and you will hear me cock my pistol. There! Now open, and mind what you are about; the guard will hear my shot."

"Absurd! what do you suspect?" returned the voice. The key grated in the lock, and an effort was made to open the door. But L'Estrange held the handle outside, and would not allow more than a chink of it to unclosé. "Now," he said, "come into the opening, and speak to me; mind the barrel of my pistol is pointing right in."

"Tut," said the voice; "what have you to dread? Look here, I have a light." And suddenly he saw, through the chink, the chamber to be illuminated.

"I found a light outside on the table," said the voice. "When I heard your steps approaching, I put the light under your bed, and drew the bedclothes down to the ground lest I should be discovered by any except you."

L'Estrange opened a little wider, and saw standing between the door and the bed the figure of a fine woman in a riding dress, who held a light, no doubt *the* light which the Spalpeen had left burning for his friend.

"I am here alone," the woman said, "and entirely in your power. I would willingly come out to you, but that I must veil the light if I do so for *my own sake*. Do not doubt me. I have come to ask assistance, not to do you harm."

Very cautiously the young man advanced into the room, looking behind the door, and all round it, which was not an extensive survey. Then he examined the bed, and was satisfied that there was no one except them two in the room.

"How dare you come to my quarters?" said the young officer. "You know you have no right to do so."

"I understand you, Frederic,—let me call you Frederic, for I am satisfied that I have the right to do so,—but necessity has no law. I am here, not from choice, but because I have no other resource."

"Your necessity is nothing to me," answered he. "Do you fancy that I am going to compromise myself by harbouring a spy? That is what I call you, whatever you may call yourself."

"Then I am only where I was before I ventured to claim shelter from you. Do what you a short time since threatened to do—alarm the guard, and I shall soon be disposed of."

"I would rather have nothing to do with disposing of you. I don't wish my name to be in any way mixed with yours. Be good enough to leave me."

"Of course, if you insist. But can you not spare me a quarter of an hour to hear what I have to say? I am here for the purpose of abandoning my late employment, which, whatever you may think of it, is legitimate military service as much as yours is. I wish, I say, to abandon my employment and this country, and to go back to England."

"Well, I have no objection."

"But I cannot do this unaided. You must aid me. If you would save me from further connection with the purveying of military intelligence, you must assist me in escaping from this country."

"Escaping! Why, you, and such as you, alone manage to go where you please. No way is closed to you. You pass in all directions like the mist or the wind."

"It has been so; but I cannot now get on board ship without help. The French general is unaccountably enraged against me, and has ordered me to be apprehended, with, I fear, the intention of treating me with much severity. I have lost my credit with the Spanish inhabitants, and I cannot again show myself to your General Graham, to whom I brought some information yesterday."

"You have been playing false all round."

"Not so. But I have been cruelly misrepresented."

"I daresay. And what becomes of the assurance which you thought proper to give me, that you were constrained to get your

bread as you were doing, having to choose between that and starvation." This was partly a random shot.

"I am fortunately no longer quite destitute. A service which I was enabled to render to the British commander has been handsomely requited. My condition is no longer one of absolute dependence, and I wish to leave this life, and go back to England."

"Do not attempt to mislead me as to what I am now going to ask. Were you on the field of Vittoria the evening of the battle?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Answer my question."

"I was there."

"Then I need no longer doubt that you have acquired means. I saw you pillaging."

"You saw me executing the behests of other persons at great peril to myself. That is not the way in which my humble means have been gained."

"Her humble means!" L'Estrange thought of the ground literally carpeted with gold and silver, and of the carts and other conveyances which he had seen at work under her directions.

"We will pass that," he said, contemptuously. "It is quite clear to me that you are rich enough, and have influence enough, to get yourself transported to any point that you wish. You are deceiving me with the story of your perils, and have some sinister purpose in so doing."

"Frederic, I swear to you that I am in as great a strait as I say. My life would be the penalty if I should fall into the power of the Spaniards or the French. Graham gave me a safe-conduct yesterday, but he would probably revoke it, and make me a prisoner, if he knew that I am again within his lines. The fact is, that I never really left. Money and a little evasion enabled me to lurk within the outposts."

"My duty is to report that you are here; only, as I have said, if you will keep out of my way, I shall not actively molest you."

"Read this, and your mind may be quite at ease as to the point of duty;" and she showed him a paper with a seal on it, and bearing the signature of the Adjutant-General at headquarters.

"I understand," said L'Estrange, after having read the document, "this to be a passport, in three languages, empowering you to enter and to depart from British posts. You just now told me that the General here would revoke it as far as this

camp is concerned, and make you a prisoner, if he knew that you were here."

"I said that I feared so; I do not know that he would. He has not done so, and so far the document remains perfectly good. I am not wilfully contravening Sir Thomas Graham's implied instructions. He believes me to have left the camp, but I dared not do so by reason of enemies outside, into whose hands if I should fall, British interests might be seriously compromised. I delay my departure simply because I have a better chance here of getting a sea passage, and of leaving this land and this life altogether."

"You have seen the General; could you not have directly asked him for a passage?"

"I did ask, but it was impossible for me to give him all my reasons for demanding it. To such reasons as I could give he simply replied that he saw no necessity for applying for a passage for me, and that I might make private arrangements for procuring one, if I thought proper."

"Exactly; you may go to one of the Spanish ports, and there, with the ample means which I believe to be at your disposal, hire a whole fleet for your removal, if you choose."

"Pardon me, Frederic. I cannot do anything of the kind. I would, I assure you, if I could. In consequence of some misunderstandings—you know how services like mine, delicate services, are likely to be attended by such—the Spanish chiefs along the coast to the westward have ordered my arrest, and it is impossible, or next to impossible, that I should elude them and embark."

"What do you propose to do?"

"I will tell you. We come now to the sole object for which I have sought your assistance. I count upon your kindness, your loyalty to your own house and blood, your gallantry as a British officer, to negotiate a passage for me to some English port. Not a captain, let his craft be what it may, but may feel warranted in taking me, when he reads Lord Wellington's passport."

"You wish to remain some hours here to acquaint yourself with our doings, or some of them. When you know all you want to know, you will probably disappear, and I shall find that I have just been amused with the project of a passage."

"Pause for a moment and reflect. I am desiring only concealment. I am willing to be concealed as rigidly as you can desire—to be under lock and key even. In such circumstances I shall find it difficult to spy out any of your movements, or to 'disappear' as you suggest."

"I know nothing about the shipmasters in the harbour, and cannot at all undertake to engage a passage for you, or to conceal you while you wait for it."

"I can give you a list of six or seven English merchant captains who are at present somewhere in the Bay of Biscay, and most of whom are probably here now. All of them know me; and not one of them, I am sure, would refuse me a passage, armed as I am with this certificate. I shall be ready to go the moment you tell me the matter is arranged. Now, take this trouble for me."

"Nay, it is not an affair that I incline to meddle in, and, again, I say that you must betake yourself elsewhere."

"Frederic, I implore you."

"You have heard my answer."

"By your father's memory, who would have shown me real affection, I entreat you not to leave me utterly friendless in this case. There is nobody else of whom I can claim the least favour. If you refuse your countenance, I am ruined and lost. Frederic, do not desert me in my need."

The lady who had thus intruded herself into L'Estrange's quarters, and claimed his assistance, was not young, although she had looked so when he caught a glimpse of her on the field of Vittoria; but she was, nevertheless, handsome. She must have been hovering on the very term of forty years, and no man could pronounce from her appearance to which side of forty the truth inclined. There were fine eyes and fine features generally; they did not require extreme youth to give them their best phase. Her figure, which her riding dress allowed to be clearly seen, was well-proportioned, her carriage good, her movements easy and graceful. Strong will, unfailing courage, were indicated by her look; but she did not impress one with the idea that these qualities were allied with the superior nature which alone could have turned them to good account. No! one could have believed her capable of falsehood or treachery—even of cruelty. "A bold intriguer; a devil if you offend her; a cursed fine woman, damn her," were opinions which had been heard concerning her to come from lips whose utterances were in those days keenly regarded.

She is the same woman who was mentioned above as having sought out L'Estrange when sketching near Salamanca, and the same whom he had seen securing the money after Vittoria. Who was she? She was known in the Peninsula as Senhora Valdez, or Madame Valdez. She told L'Estrange that she was his father's sister, that she had been widowed many years ago in England, and was now the wife of a Portuguese officer, who

was serving in the allied army. Now she could not have been more than half-sister to Colonel l'Estrange, that his son knew; whether she were even half-sister was very doubtful. L'Estrange's grandfather had been married twice; that the young man recollected. The second marriage had been an unhappy one, and there had been a separation. He had never heard his father say many words concerning it—certainly he had never said that it had produced him a half-sister. At the same time, this woman may possibly have been the daughter of the wife who was put away. She knew a good deal about the family, which was easiest accounted for by supposing that she was connected with it. But there were no means at hand of testing the truth of her story.

It may have been gathered from the above conversation that L'Estrange's hardness of heart would at last give way, and in truth it did. The Senhora supped in his rooms in great secrecy, and on hard fare, which she didn't mind. She made him promise to give her an asylum until the passage might be procured, and to exert himself to find the passage as early as possible.

Madame Valdez could get on without much attendance, and was soon accommodated. L'Estrange gave up to her the apartment in which he had found her—his little room. For the present he took possession of Perrin's chamber, the latter being on duty that night, and a very broken rest he had on Pat's bed. It irked him to think how he should manage to get a berth in a ship going to England for his relative, as she styled herself. She had positively forbidden him to make inquiries through the Quartermaster-General's department; so that the official information which stood ready for the use of the service was of no avail, and he was thrown upon his own resources as much as if he had been alone, a stranger in a foreign port, having this additional disadvantage, that he was compelled to make his inquiries in a stealthy manner.

He really did not know how he should set to work. He devised a dozen schemes, turned them in his mind, and finally abandoned them. It seemed at last as if the woman would not get away; as if detection of her in the camp was inevitable; as if he himself were likely to experience considerable annoyance through this very adventure, in which he had been mixed up without the slightest seeking on his own part. "What the deuce brought the woman here just now?" he said to himself, as he turned in agitation on the bed. "Haven't I been an ass to listen to her at all! It seems that I cannot help her, and that I shall infallibly damage myself on her account. All the ordinary facilities which we have for transport she refuses.

There would have been no difficulty at all if she had been an ordinary passenger or a bale of merchandise. I could have shipped her off as easily as——”

The reverie broke off at the thought of the small packet of merchandise which he *was* going to send, and of the means by which he was going to send it. “Hah!” thought he, and he jumped from his bed as the idea struck him, “I wonder if Oakley would help in any way. He knows, or has the means of knowing, about all the craft on the coast. There is no harm in consulting him. She has made no reservation concerning inquiries among naval people, and I won’t ask her anything further about how I shall proceed. By Jove, I’ll ask Oakley about it. Cursed stupid that I didn’t think of him before!” This bright idea was worth a couple of hours’ sleep to him in the cool of the morning.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHIPPED IN GOOD ORDER.

When he awoke from his slumber, it was necessary to be on the alert to prevent the Senhora from being disturbed. L’Estrange went outside and met his man Finnis, whom he informed that he had closed his room for the present, and no one need go thither; further, that it would be well to direct Mr Perrin’s attendant to be quick in bringing coffee for that gentleman, as he would be off duty presently. Then he went outside and met Pat.

“Look here, Pat,” said he; “come in quietly and gently, and take your coffee; I’ll tell you after why I want you to keep still.”

“Ah, then, what the devil! have ye found somebody dangerously wounded on the sthrand, eh?”

“Hush, my boy, will you? You shall know all about it directly, but hold your sword up and don’t make a row.”

“Sure I’m as quiet as an unwaned babe.”

“Just about. But I want you to be much quieter than that. If your room looks a little deranged, never mind. I did it. I took the liberty of lying on your bed for a little.”

“Oh, ye did! Well, now, this looks mighty mysterious.”

“Speak low, will you? Go and make your toilet and take your coffee; then I’ll speak further to you.”

"Be me sowl, but ye make me flesh creep, so ye do. How the divil is a man to take his coffee, or wash his face, or do anything else collectidly, when he's intimidated and affrighted in this way?"

L'Estrange did not answer, but pointed towards Pat's chamber door. Thereupon the Spalpeen disappeared for a space, re-entered with a fresher appearance, and proceeded to imbibe his coffee and to dispose of some bread in a manner which did not bespeak that he was intimidated or affrighted to an injurious extent.

"Now then! a *chasse* after that, and I'll maybe be able to bear anything that ye may have to revale, ominous monsther that ye are. Hah!" smacking his lips, "ye may burrust now if ye were a thunder cloud. I can enjure the bould."

"Come in here," said L'Estrange, leading him back to his chamber; "I want you to get under canvas for a couple of nights, and give me the room."

"Will I take me bed?"

"No. I want the bed. Some of the men on duty will lend you a mattress, and so on."

"Ah, maybe they will. Is that all?"

"No, you old oaf. I said I would tell you why I asked. You see my room's occupied."

"I don't see it. But I've a mysterious intimation that such is the case. Well, me mind's grasped th' idea."

"I can't tell you by whom it is occupied, that being a secret which I am not at liberty to disclose. Probably I may let you know hereafter. But the circumstances are most pressing. Now, can I depend on you to keep counsel, and to give me up the whole building?"

"Sure, ye can. I'm not curious. I never waa."

"There's very little to excite curiosity, I assure you; and it's anything but a convenient mystery to me."

"Ye have me profound commiseration. Would it perplex ye if I was to lie down on the bed for an hour or so? I'm sleepy."

"No hurry, Pat; all right till after breakfast."

Madame Valdez was well accustomed to wait upon herself. L'Estrange contrived to convey to her some food, and she gave very little trouble.

As soon as the young man could reckon upon two or three hours' leisure, he went quietly to the jetty where the supplies for camp were generally landed, and was fortunate enough to find the Aiguille's jolly-boat lying there. She would be returning to the ship very shortly, and L'Estrange begged a passage in her, having first ascertained that the captain was on board.

"I didn't think," said L'Estrange, "when at parting yesterday you so kindly offered to do any little commissions at home, that I should be here bothering you on the subject, or one very like it, to-day; but so it is. I want your advice, and your help too, if you can give it me, in getting freight to England for some awkward goods."

"Certainly. I am much at your service. I hope it's nothing contraband."

"I had better explain, and then you will judge."

So he told Oakley the main points of the story, suppressing, however, her claim of relationship, which was distasteful to him, and then asked if he could put him in the way of speedily procuring a passage.

"What you say about this passport renders it perfectly safe for any English ship to carry her. You say that you have seen her before, and know something of her history, that you believe her to be English-born, and that she has probably rendered services to our military commanders."

"Quite so. What else may belong to her history I am unable to say."

"I don't think that matters. There can be no objection to her going home, and, supposing her papers to be in proper form, and no impediment to arise before I start, I don't mind taking her myself. It will be easy to rig up a berth for her, and if she proves as agreeable as some specimens of her profession with whom I am already acquainted, it will be a treat for me to take her the voyage."

This was better fortune than L'Estrange had expected. He thanked Oakley again and again for helping him so readily and so effectually, and thought now that the adventure would end quietly. Oakley said that probably her wish for concealment arose from some mistake that she had made or some unimportant scrape, and that if her papers were only in due form and satisfactory, he should raise no objection, and she might come aboard as secretly as could among them be managed. His departure would probably be the day after to-morrow, and he would give facilities for getting her off to-morrow night, if that would do.

L'Estrange said that he had so little expected such a prompt solution of his difficulties, that he could not positively answer for the lady without consulting her. He, however, had much reason to believe that the arrangement would suit her admirably; and, unless any notice of the contrary were given by him, it might be understood to stand good.

Oakley, though pressed to come and spend another day on

shore, said he could not now be absent from the ship at all, and they must come on board and see him before starting.

"This is good fortune; it will entirely answer my wish," said Madame Valdez. "I knew you would manage it. To-morrow night, then. I wish it were to-night. But I must keep close, and be patient."

All difficulties about concealment having been overcome, it only remained to effect the embarkation without hindrance. The Aiguille's boat would be at the jetty by eleven o'clock. L'Estrange intended at first to be himself the Senhora's only escort; but on reflection he saw that he must have a confederate. He might be suddenly ordered for some duty, and then, unless another person were in the secret, the plan might fail. He must take Mr Perrin into his confidence.

"Pat, I want your aid in a rather delicate adventure."

"And ye'll get it."

"Do you promise before you know what it is?"

"I do. I'm fond of delicate adventures. They come mightily conveniently now when there's nothing stirrin'."

"But you'd like to know what it is?"

"If it's necessary to instruct me in me lesson, ye can do't. Otherwise, just name times and places and so on, and I'll be with ye."

"I must instruct you, as you call it, because you may have to act instead of me, if I should be named for any duty to-night."

"To-night! Oh, then, it's to-night."

"I told you there was a person in occupation of my room."

"Ye did."

"That person is going to England in the Aiguille, but must be got on board with great secrecy. Captain Oakley's boat will be at the jetty by eleven. The passenger has a passport, but will be all the better for an escort to the jetty. We will both go, if possible; otherwise, whichever is free."

"That's all right. When do we meet? Do we go from our house?"

"Yes. We'll meet in the house. In case of my not being able to attend, you must make the acquaintance of the fugitive beforehand, and I'll introduce you to her."

"To her! Holy Moses! Ah, ye devil! This is why I'm a friendless outcast. This is why me lodgin' is on the cowl'd ground."

"Nonsense, Pat. It's an important matter. It's no love affair."

"I don't care if it was. But of course it's important. Is

she dark or fair, or a mixture of the two, like Biddy Magrath, who had one cheek like a peach, and the other like a medlar, and was called in Drogheda the Chiaroscuro?"

"It isn't a young woman at all. She has sons as old as either of us, if she speaks the truth. Anyway, she might have them."

"Might she, now! Lord love us all, what a world this is! Well, and ye're going to send her to England? How did ye get the pass ye spoke of? The Adjutant-General's people don't often lend themselves to affairs of this kind, unless it's an old intriguer of some rank and smell."

"Affairs of *what* kind? I didn't procure the passport. She got it herself. Only, as she knew relations of mine at home, she asked me to assist her in getting the passage. She's an English woman with a Portuguese name. Don't you see?"

"No. I see nothin'. I'm blind and dumb too in this matter. Sure I'm glad this impropriety is to end so soon, and I'll be able to take ye once more to me bosom as a dacent and respectable person. Ah, Fred, ye disappoint me entirely, ye do. Is it for this that I've been attending late and early to your mor'ls, and exhorting ye to walk betimes in wisdom's way?"

"Then it's all settled. About half-past ten we rendezvous."

"We do. Yes. I say, Fred."

"What's the matter?"

"It's a fine thing to have a character."

"How?"

"To be considered a discreet, steady young man, ye know."

"Yes; what of it?"

"Well, I was thinking if any ordinary man, like meself, for instance, who hadn't the seal on his forehead, had tried a thrick of this kind, what kind friends would have said about him, what a bobbery there'd have been, how all the righteous spir'its would have been exercised!"

"I tell you again this is no love matter. Perhaps you'll know all about it before long. There'll be no secret to keep after——"

"No, don't tell me. Details of folly and wickedness afflict me very unpleasantly. Ye'll be good enough to spare me the demor'ling particulars."

The embarkation went off, after all, without any *contretemps*. The weather had changed, and there was a little rain falling, which was rather an advantage, as there was nobody about but men on duty, and neither boats nor persons could be discerned from a distance. Mr Perrin had not the satisfaction of seeing the Senhora's face, as she took care that there should not be

much light anywhere near her in the house before they started. Their way led behind the hills on which the batteries were, and the jetty, which was used by the camp, was of course in a place sheltered from the enemy's view.

Only one guard, near the water, had to be passed, and here L'Estrange, going boldly forward, asked to see the officer commanding it. The officer having presented himself, L'Estrange showed him the Senhora's passport and the Senhora herself, who was found to answer the description given in the paper. It was then stated that she was going to embark as quietly as possible in a man-of-war's boat, which was expected to be waiting at the jetty. The captain of the guard was not at all astonished at the proceeding, the passing in and out of camp of persons of both sexes in this mysterious way being not uncommon. He merely stipulated that one of his officers and a file of men should witness the embarkation, that he might be satisfied that nothing was done beyond what the passport warranted, and what the lady stated to be her intention.

The Aiguille's boat, with a midshipman in charge, was duly waiting at the jetty, and answered the hail of the officer of the guard. The Senhora bade her attendants a kind adieu, and stepped into the boat, the military officer said that all was right, and the midshipman commanded that the boat should "shove off," which she did, and the lady was soon in the mist and entirely out of their sight. Her two attendants walked back to the guard with the officer who had accompanied them from thence, and there bade him good night, after which, being within the lines, they went leisurely home, not much heeding the drizzle.

"Thank Heaven she's off!" exclaimed L'Estrange, when they were alone.

"Amen to that!" responded the Spalpeen. "I'll sleep in me own bed, so I will. This has been a tame business, or maybe I mightn't have been so glad 'twas all over."

"It has ended quietly, I am happy to know. But if she had stayed longer, there might have been trouble for her and for me too."

"Sorrow a doubt of it. Well, I cannot be witness against ye, for I never got sight of her face."

"She was here, Pat, simply to get passed secretly to England. She threw herself on me, and claimed my protection and my help in getting the passage. At first I refused to admit the claim; but she persuaded me at last, and I'm not sure that I was right in being persuaded."

"Well, I suppose we'll hear no more about her for the

present. I hope they've some cool water beyond, for I've a great thirst on me."

Next day Colonel Stanshon and L'Estrange went to bid farewell to Captain Oakley, as he could not come on shore. Oakley was very discreet regarding the Senhora, and told Stanshon that she was an Englishwoman who had had a Portuguese husband, but who was now leaving the country to rejoin her relations. L'Estrange bowed to her when she appeared, and nothing occurred to indicate that he had been previously acquainted with her. But she found an opportunity of telling him privately that she was well accommodated on board, and that she felt grateful to him for caring for her so well as he had done. Adieux were said, and the Aiguille was in the offing before sundown.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FALSE ASSAULT

L'Estrange now turned his thoughts from this plaguy business, and looked forward to the renewal of the siege, where the work would be all to do over again. Our troops had barely managed to keep their trenches open, and the works had much deteriorated during the blockade, while the same period had been of immense advantage to the enemy; for he had sent away useless mouths from the fortress, had rearmed his works and reprovisioned his garrison, and had obtained all the reinforcement that France was then in a condition to give him. He could have had none of these advantages (being completely shut in by land) if the sea had not been left open to him. The stores were now arriving in pretty rapid succession. Wellington's visits were rather frequent; and, although he complained of some of the errors which, as it would seem, Great Britain invariably commits when supplying the services,—such as a supply of certain new pieces without the corresponding ammunition, or the heads of entrenching tools without handles that would fit them,—yet on the whole he was pretty well satisfied, and evidently contemplated the recommencement of operations at an early date. Troops were arriving to take up the siege duties. There was increased bustle in camp. The Spalpeen's spirits rose very much.

But L'Estrange was destined to hear more of Madame Valdez. He received one day a visit from a Portuguese officer who was attached to one of the divisions which had lately come up; and this officer let him know that he came on the part of Colonel Souza, to demand information as to the truth of a rumour which had reached him (the Colonel), to the effect that a lady, known as Senhora Valdez, had been concealed some time in the British camp, and had remained in Captain L'Estrange's quarters.

Captain L'Estrange did not know why he was to give an account to Colonel Souza as to who might or might not have obtained shelter in his quarters. But this remark the officer met by informing him that Colonel Souza was a well-known admirer of the lady in question, and claimed the right to make inquiries as to her movements.

Now the Senhora had particularly cautioned L'Estrange to keep silence about her doings, for political and military reasons. He would, therefore, in any case have used much reticence; but his disposition to reserve was increased by what he considered the arrogance of the Colonel's message, whose right to make demands of that kind the young officer was by no means ready to admit. He gave a short and decided answer, and thereupon the nuncio, thanking him for his candour, which, as he said, he had anticipated, requested that he would favour Colonel Souza with a meeting. L'Estrange regarded this as a deliberate plan of some bully to fasten a quarrel on him; and in great dudgeon he placed the Portuguese officer in communication with Lieutenant Perrin, the latter having been induced to put such constraint upon his principles and tastes as to assist his friend in going through a hostile communication and encounter.

"Ye're very apt," said this pacific young man, "to hold your barr'l out of th' horizontal. Don't do that, Fred; keep the tool level, and ye'll shoot the impudent blackguard as sure as Cork's in Ireland."

"Possibly he knows also how to level his barrel," answered L'Estrange.

"Don't believe it, me boy. They know nothing about it—nothing to call scientific. Do as I tell ye, and ye'll shoot him like a starlin'."

It is presumed that L'Estrange did as Mr Perrin told him, for he wounded the Colonel severely, and could not feel sorry that he had done so, considering his arrogant behaviour. So far well. But there was yet more to come. There had been a good many private encounters in the blockading force during

what might be, for distinction's sake, called their idle time. They wanted to keep their hands in, perhaps, and so turned their weapons on one another. The Commander-in-chief had heard of these duels, and had chafed and sworn a good deal concerning them, but had taken no active step. However, L'Estrange's affair was the hair that was to break the camel's back. When Lord Wellington understood that a Portuguese regiment was deprived of its colonel through one of these meetings, he, having been put wrong previously by some untoward occurrence, took smart action thereon, and did not chafe nor swear. The action was a great deal more dangerous than chafing or swearing, and it was as much as some influential officers, English and Portuguese, could do to prevent an official inquiry, with a view to punishing the offenders. As the orders against duelling were old, and somewhat obsolete, his Lordship at last consented to forego further inquiry; but he issued a stringent fresh order on the subject, and officers saw that they had better think twice before letting it be known that they had brought affairs of honour to the arbitrament of the pistol or sword.

All this gave disagreeable notoriety to the duel; and as very few knew what it really was about, many explained it according to their own imaginations, and various and strange accounts of what led to it were current in camp. Well, it had its nine days there, and after that there was plenty to thrust it off the carpet.

All was now in order for the recommencement of the siege, and the batteries once more began to assail the walls of the devoted place. The defences had been greatly strengthened while the attack was interrupted; and the arrival of fresh ordnance and ammunition, and of such reinforcements as could be spared from France, greatly encouraged the garrison. For a few days the artillery duel which was maintained seemed to be pretty even. Both sides, of course, lost men, and both had guns silenced. While it was being consulted how best the allies could attain a preponderance in the cannonade, a discovery was made which caused for a time some alarm among the assailants. The river had been thought too deep to be forded, but an enterprising English officer, having carefully explored it in the night, discovered at length a practicable ford. It was fairly argued that a ford which could be so readily found by the besiegers, must be known to the garrison, and that the latter might be expected to cross the stream in the night, and endeavour to gain temporary possession of the batteries for the purpose of spiking the guns. Troublesome precautions had therefore to be taken. There was, at the same

time, a little comfort to be derived from the knowledge that the ford existed. Whenever the assault should be repeated, it would be possible for a part of the stormers to cross the ford so as to avoid the perilous passage beneath the arm of the hornwork.

Another day, and it was perceived that the batteries of the attack were in the ascendant. The walls gave way in several places; there were yawning breaches in the body of the place, and in the outworks also. The allies were able to construct batteries in front of the isthmus only about three hundred yards from the defences, and these did great execution.

It was now decided to execute a *ruse de guerre* by making a sham attack, the object of which was to induce the defenders to spring, prematurely and to their own detriment, the mines which they had prepared to scatter the assaulting columns.

"Perrin, there's a chance for you," said a field-officer to Pat. "A volunteer has been called for to command a small force, which is to raise an alarm by pretending to assault."

"I'm off," was Mr Perrin's answer; and thereupon he went off without his coat, which he happened to have laid aside, and with a smoking-cap on his head, fearful that if he should lose a minute in dressing himself correctly, some other might be beforehand with him.

"Sure I hear there's a volunteer called for," said Pat to a staff-officer when he got to the office of the Adjutant-General.

"It has been announced in orders that an officer and a small party may offer themselves for a service to be performed to-night," replied the officer.

"Has anybody's offer been accepted, do ye know?"

"I don't know for certain; but I think not. The order has not been out twenty minutes. I'll ask the Adjutant-General, if you like."

"Tell him I'm a volunteer. Say I was refused at the last assault, and be hanged to it, because I wasn't quite well of some cuts, and so on. I'm all right now."

In a minute or two the officer was back again with the intelligence that they had rather expected Mr Perrin's application, and had been keeping the duty open for him.

"Then I forgive them everything," said Pat. "See me put properly in orders, that's a good fellow, and have me instructions ready in time that I may study them."

Gallant fellows, to ten times the number that were needed, offered themselves from different regiments to compose the party which was to be led on a service of extraordinary danger by the Spalpeen. Everything was arranged for him as far as could be foreseen, and by evening he got his instructions.

"It'll be a smart brush, probably," said Perrin to his chum. "If I shouldn't come back, there's a letter in me pistol-case. Turn up the charges and the wads and th' oil rag in the first compartment, and there's another hollow beyond. Stick a fork in the cover, and it'll come up; there's no ring that it might be a secret reciss. Ye'll get that letter delivered, and it contains the most of what I've got to say to them that are not here."

"I'll see to it, Pat. Anything else?"

"Well, if I don't walk back, I hope I'll be brought back. I hope I'll be recovered somehow; and it's me particular request that drummer Gurdon be not allowed to bate the muffled drum. The man has no feeling at all, and no conception of how a serious instrumt like that ought to be played. He makes no distinction between a requiem and Darby Kelly, th' ignor'nt ijiot."

As these directions had been given to L'Estrange at least a dozen times before, he had no difficulty in remembering them.

"Good night, L'Estrange, me boy. I hope shortly we'll be wishing good morning."

"I hope so. Good night, Pat."

Perrin crossed quietly to the isthmus, so did all his volunteers, getting over separately, and attracting no attention. On the isthmus they joined him, being all present soon after midnight. The batteries fired heavily all night, principally on the breaches. Mr Perrin was to start and make his way with great secrecy to the foot of the main breach, passing along the same difficult route by which the assaulting column had advanced on the night of the unsuccessful storming. After giving him time to reach his destination, the troops on the isthmus were to move out of the trenches as if for a general assault. Pat would sound the advance to show that he was on his stage of action, and thereupon our batteries would divert their fire a little from the breach, so that the party might feign a rush at it.

It was a terrible scramble to arrive at the breach; but nevertheless the volunteers wended their way undiscovered, until the allied troops came out of the trenches and made demonstrations which the enemy could not fail to see. Then the French manned their walls, used different means of illuminating the ground around their works, and were not long in ascertaining that a party of greater or less strength was approaching the breach. They turned artillery on to Pat's path, and watched to get musket-shots at his men as they pursued their rough course. But by this time the worst of the passage was over, and they were on comparatively smooth ground. Mr Perrin, seeing that

he was discovered, at once put his band in order, sounded the advance, and dashed forward towards the breach, shouting and cheering, as if a heavy column were coming on in its might to force the walls. Our artillery, hearing the bugle, sent their shot clear of the breach, and Mr Perrin, sword in hand, rushed at the broken escarp and clambered up a part of its height.

In those days it was not easy to deceive old French soldiers as to any operation of war. Panic was a rare thing among them. The cool, steady troops quickly detected the kind of attack which was being made. They did not spring their mines, nor show the amount of fire which they would be able to display wherever the real assault should take place; but they quite intended to punish those who had sought to alarm them, and had brought them all to the ramparts so wantonly. They assembled a heavy force of musketry at the head of the breach, and began to make their lead fly about after a copious sort. There was not light to distinguish the men of Pat's party by; and the weapon of those days had rather the character of wasting twenty shots for every one that it fired to the mark, otherwise the volunteers would have been extinct in five minutes.

They had shouted themselves hoarse; they had let off their muskets; they had done everything that they could do in imitation of a strong and earnest force bent on breaking into the place. Their work was over. The enemy was too wary to be deceived, and their business was to make good their retreat if they could. But retreating in any circumstances was not at all to Mr Perrin's mind. "Follow me, me boys, and we'll soon make them stop this rattle," said he; and he toiled up three or four steps among the rubbish. Already more than a third of the party was dead or disabled. The bullets which did not strike them came uncomfortably near, and were heard to smite unpleasantly on the ruins of the wall; and at intervals a Frenchman shouted down to them some grim sarcasm, which they could feel if they could not understand it. Its tone told what it meant.

Perrin had taken the few steps forward which have been narrated, and a handful of his party, not comprehending what was to come of the advance, followed him as closely as was practicable in the ruins. Close behind him on his left, a sturdy fellow was struck, and rolled over. Pat turned his head for an instant, and as he did so, felt that he was hit near the left shoulder—indeed the shot turned him half round. At the same time something grasped his legs. The pain and the impediment together brought him to the rough ground. But he

had not lost his head. He had his sword fast round his right wrist, so that he was able to put down his hand to feel for what was dragging at his feet. The hand came upon a face, and presently, as it was passing over the face, it was caught suddenly between two rows of teeth, and as suddenly let go. The bite was not very hard. His hand moved again and came upon a belt and buttons, which, by their form and arrangement, he knew to belong to an English soldier. He was in the grasp of a dying man, or, rather, of a dead man, for the arms relaxed their hold, and he put away the impediment, which was now motionless and heavy.

"Are ye here, sir?" called a voice near him.

"Here, give me a hand," answered Pat. "I'm all right. I was dragged down by a wounded man."

"I believe they're all wounded men," answered the voice. "I'm Corporal Edmonds. Except your honour and myself, there doesn't seem to be any of the party left."

"We must get in," said Pat.

"How are we to do it, sir? We've done what we came to do. We can't take the place."

"We'll see about that if you'll be smart and get me up. Ah! what the divil are ye at? Zounds, sure that arm's wounded, I forgot. Take hold of the other."

"You're not fit to be here, sir. Your honour should draw off while it's still dark. We can do no more, you and I."

At this moment a shot from our batteries struck the breach close to them, and bruised and nearly blinded them with splinters. Then another ball, and another, buried themselves among the debris.

"As I live be bread," exclaimed Lieutenant Perrin, "the deluded gunners think it's all over, and have turned their pieces on the breach again. Bedad, there's an end of getting up there; it's damned unfrindly, so it is."

"The General will be wanting a report from ye, sir. That's all your honour can do now; but you ought to get back alive. We must scramble down on hands and feet the best way we can. I'll help ye as much as I'm able."

"Shout, then, that the retreat is ordered, and all hands are to come down to the water-side." But nobody could answer the shout.

And thereupon the two began to crawl and tumble down the breach. When they had descended a certain way, they were at any rate clear of the aim of our artillery, and the French, no longer seeing or hearing an enemy, were not firing very briskly.

They were on the strand once more, and under the wall passing parallel to the faces of the hornwork, the sentries from which might detect them at any minute and bring a deadly fire upon them.

"As sure as death," said the corporal, "it must be the day that's breaking. We shall be seen for certain in a quarter of an hour; and what's more than that, the tide must be rising, and fifty yards farther on the strand will be under deep water."

"Be the powers, we must take to the river. We can't find the ford now. Can ye swim? I can if I've me two arms, but I don't know how I'd do with one."

"I can swim well, sir; and we must try. I'll keep close to you; it's our only chance."

Perrin sheathed his sword. The corporal unfixed his bayonet and slung his musket on his back, observing as he did so, that "he'd bring her off if he could, the jada." Then the two took to the water. The day was just dawning, which gave them a little help, and they struck out gallantly. A desperate swim it must have been; but the corporal kept close on Pat's left side and steadied him, and they made way slowly. They were two hard, determined, dauntless men, or they never would have reached the other bank alive. More than once it seemed a hopeless endeavour. They could not see the other shore, and were fearful that they were swimming down toward the sea; but they kept on. It never during the passage grew light enough for them to see their way; but they got encouragement for all that. A sentry challenged in the English tongue, and then they knew they had hit our side somewhere.

"We're friends. Send us a rope or something," shouted Perrin, as the two floated for a minute in silence.

"Ay, ay," answered the sentry, and the swimmers struck out again with renewed strength. A little while and they could hear the buzz of voices, and a halloo which desired them to "shout." They shouted as lustily as they could, and the men on shore kept directing them by their voices.

"I make out something in the water—it's moving. That's he," sung out a man. Then they all saw something. Three or four of them entered the water up to their necks, and came upon the fugitives. The men from camp could see better than the swimmers, and went straight towards them.

"You are not out of your depth now; try the ground. By — there's two of them."

The adventure was now over. Perrin went to make a report of his proceedings, exhausted as he was; and having done that

he went to his quarters. L'Estrange was up, believing greatly in Pat's luck, hoping to see him back soon after dawn, and very anxious that he should not be required to examine the pistol-case.

"Hurrah!" said L'Estrange; "you've got back all right. You're rather wet; but never mind. I knew you'd pull through. Get off your clothes now. Let your man help you."

"Begorra, ye'll have to cut away this sleeve, I'm thinking. I've got a crack, Fred, in my arm. The water has made the cloth such a colour that it isn't easy to see the marks; but I think it's bled a good deal. Divil take it, we didn't get in."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE STORMING OF THE FORTRESS.

Everybody was entirely satisfied with the manner in which Lieutenant Perrin had performed his duty. He had done everything that he was required to do, and more than any one expected. Indeed, his reappearance with only one wound was greatly better than the general expectation; and as to his having left so many of his party dead on the breach, that excited no remark at all. The corporal was promoted immediately, and Pat was given to understand that his service should be brought under notice of the Commander-in-chief.

The bullet had, to use Mr Perrin's own expression, "ex-thracted itself,"—that is to say, it had gone right through his arm below the shoulder, so there was no feeling for it, or other excruciating operation. Only for one day was Pat kept in bed; after that he was allowed to dress and to move about within limits.

On the second day, Wellington, who was very desirous to bring the siege to a close, came once more to inspect the works, and he looked very minutely at the state of things. He had got the report of the sham attack, and while examining the breach, made allusions to it.

Lieutenant Perrin was seated on a camp-stool outside his quarters, smoking a cigar, and reflecting on the many impediments which in this sublunary world obtrude themselves in the way of a fair stand-up fight, when round the corner of the building came a staff-officer, guided by a sergeant of his own regiment.

"Lieutenant Perrin, I believe!" said he of the staff.

"The same, at your service," answered Mr Perrin.

"Can you walk as far as round that hill yonder, sir? Lord Wellington would like to speak to you."

"I don't know if I can, but I will," was Mr Perrin's reply.

"Sure, I hope nothin's the matter. I'll be a long time with this divil of an arrum in changing me coat."

"His Lordship is not fond of waiting, and you'd much better come as you are. He knows you're on the sick-list."

"Well, if you'll be bail for me," said Pat; "but I hope he's not displeased. Sure, 'twasn't my fault that I didn't get in."

"I didn't see any sign of displeasure."

"Ye'll take a drink of whisky, now you're here?"

"No, no. You really must be smart. Will you take my arm?"

"Your *lift* arrum is a better one than mine at prisint, and I'd take it if I could; but if ye mane to lind it me as a support, why, then, ye'll remimber me legs are all right; so come on."

"His nose looks mighty vicious," thought Pat, as they approached a group of officers, in the centre of whom was the Commander-in-chief looking through a telescope. Pat halted at a respectful distance, and there was a little murmuring conversation among the group of officers as they looked at him. At length Wellington lowered his glass, gave some order, and made as though he would move to another station, when his eye caught Mr Perrin with his arm in a sling, and at the same moment the officer who had fetched Pat said to him: "Lieutenant Perrin, my Lord; the officer who commanded the storming party in the feint." The answer to which was: "Hah! let him come here."

He looked at Pat for a second, and then said to him, "You were on the great breach the other night?"

"I was, me Lord."

"Were you able to take any notice of its condition? Could it have been ascended if you had been in earnest?"

"Undoubtedly it could. I'd have been at the top if all me men hadn't been killed."

"Thank you, sir. It's damned lucky for you that you can swim so well." And the great man passed on.

This was the sort of notice which men who had been confronting death in half-a-dozen ways got from the Commander-in-chief, if they got any notice at all. He wasn't a demonstrative leader; but a look or a word from a man who had pretty nearly established his right to the prefix of "Great" before his

name was an object of ambition. Every man in camp envied Lieutenant Perrin, and thought he had got a reward for his night's work.

But their minds were speedily turned from the Spalpeen to something more exciting. The result of Wellington's visit to the trenches before San Sebastian was that he ordered another assault. He ordered it in a vicious manner, showing that he was not satisfied with the style in which the former storm had been conducted, and that he intended that without fail, and at whatever cost, he would have the place this time. Now, that he had reason to be dissatisfied with the former attack most men believe; but they believe also that the fault was with the too sanguine and impatient leaders, and by no means with the brigades engaged, who did everything that brave men could do. The order, by calling for "men who could show others how to mount a breach," seemed to imply that in the former case the men engaged did *not* know how to mount a breach, which was felt to be a cruel and undeserved reflection. However, he knew his troops, and his troops knew him. The result of the imputation, fair or unfair, was that every officer and man in the besieging force resolved now that they would have San Sebastian.

"We are to work by daylight this time; I like that," said Captain l'Estrange. "All things considered, we gain more than we lose by that arrangement."

"Maybe ye do," was Mr Perrin's answer. "It's mighty inconvenient scramblin' up a brache in the dark, I can tell ye. But then, if it's light, and ye can see your men, and can see your way, th' enemy can see *you*, and can take aim at ye."

In darkness an assailant may gain much by way of surprise; but he is, on the other hand, likely to lose much by blunders. When it is considered that he is to endeavour to force his way into the place by paths with which he is altogether unacquainted, and along which the enemy is sure to have placed every obstacle in his power, one perceives that, on the whole, he is likely to save more than he will lose by taking daylight hours for his adventure. He may perhaps lose more at the beginning, but when the battle is well joined, he will see his way to the object which he aims at, be able to use his force with the greatest effect, and one part of the attacking body will see and communicate with the other.

It was fortunate, one may conclude, that Wellington ordered this second assault of San Sebastian to be made in daylight, for there were so many difficulties to be overcome after the breaches were carried—difficulties of which the besiegers knew little or

nothing—that in the darkness it would have been wellnigh impossible to know how to deal with them. Even on this second occasion the allies had not chosen to become masters of the hornwork before proceeding to assault the body of the place, and they were near paying dearly for the omission. They had, however, very much damaged the face of the hornwork by their artillery; and as for the sea-face of the main rampart, where the attempt had before been made to get in, they had made the whole length of it one ruin, so that in itself it seemed to offer no difficulty, and the defence of it would rest solely with the living power that should look down from its broken crest.

But in reality this broken rampart was more difficult to deal with than might have been supposed, or than was supposed. It had a retaining wall inside it as well as outside, and, contrary to what is usual in fortified towns, this inner wall was twenty feet high, or *deep*, taking the besiegers' view of it. There was no step or slope near the breach by which the wall could be descended; but some of the houses of the town abutted upon the wall. Moreover, the houses near the breach were all loopholed for musketry, so that marksmen might pick off with ease any hardy fellows who might try to make the perilous descent of the wall. Yet it occurs, perhaps, to the reader, that the stormers, on gaining a breach, do not require to descend immediately into the interior, but will effect their purpose better by extending right and left along the rampart of the work which they may master, in course of doing which they are sure sooner or later to find a way down. True, but in this case the cunning Frenchmen had well provided against any extension. They had cut off and fenced off the breaches from the sound parts of the ramparts to right and left of them, so that when a party had mounted a breach, instead of finding that its work had been done, it would have to commence afresh, and choose between a hand-to-hand fight for the traverses or fences which the enemy had made across the ramparts, and a drop of twenty feet perpendicular, to be accomplished under the very muzzles of the hostile muskets. In either case the enemy would be protected, while the stormers would be wholly exposed to every destructive device which he could adopt.

One word more of explanation. When an assailant has gained a certain advantage, and finds that there are serious obstacles to his gaining more, and that if he attempts to remain long where he is considering his next step he will certainly find the position to be too hot for him, his resource is to entrench himself, or, as the phrase is, to *make a lodgment* on the ground which he has got. If he can do this he will at any rate get temporary

shelter, and a new starting-point. But the substance of the ramparts at San Sebastian was of such a character that very little could be done with it in the way of digging and hedging. This is a serious, but not an insuperable, difficulty. It may be met by bringing up long baskets called *gabions*, stuffed with wool or some equally light and resisting substance, and of them forming the outline of a shelter, which may afterwards be improved in any way which circumstances will admit of.¹

An important step, taken in pursuance of Lord Wellington's order to assault, was the springing of some heavily charged mines which the allies had in readiness. This explosion blew away much of a screen of earth which covered a face of the hornwork; and in the ruins of it the troops formed speedily sheltered trenches, by which they would pass some of the distance towards the assault, instead of being all the way exposed.

This being accomplished, the sooner the struggle took place the better. At eleven o'clock in the forenoon, the tide having by that run out so as considerably to uncover the strand, the first division of the assaulting force, preceded by the forlorn hope, emerged from the trenches, and began its march along the shore towards the foot of the great breach. It was, of course, discovered immediately, and fired upon from all sides, artillery and musketry smiting it in front and all along its flank, but without materially checking its advance. The ordeal was frightful, and many fell, but those who survived pursued steadily their way along the rocky passage, keeping as close together as the rugged way would allow. The rain of fire from the guns was not, however, to be their only torment. Suddenly the French exploded some enormous mines on the path, sending the earth and stones in volumes into the air, and concealing the effect by the cloud of smoke which arose. Wonderful, however, to narrate, not more than forty men were destroyed by this tremendous volcano. The forlorn hope were already past the range of the mine, the head of the column it was that felt the shock, but the great mass of men, scarcely shaken by it, tramped on sternly as before. The break in the advance was immediately recovered, and the gallant column bore itself onwards to the breach.

Up went the forlorn hope under a very torrent of fire. Its brave leader, little more than a lad, bounded ahead, his men following through the tempest, regarding nothing to right or

¹ It must be remembered that the statements apply to the arts of attack and defence as they were in 1813. The improvements which have since been made in firearms would make things different now, but with those improvements our story has nought to do.

left, only pressing on. Almost immediately the youth was slain, and only a skeleton of his party was left standing, but that skeleton pressed on. Behind the little band came the heavy column, and that, though smitten and torn in its ascent, pushed with great momentum up the ruins. It was not in the power of fire to stop that advance. In a continuous stream, deaths and wounds notwithstanding, it breasted the deadly slope. Smitten in front, smitten in flank, smitten in rear,—“scourged with fire from all sides,”¹—it pressed doggedly forward, showing every moment gaps great and small in its substance, but closing into the gaps as fast as they were made. The strength of the attack is kept up by reinforcements, which press forward from the rear; for the strand is covered with armed men all the way back to the entrenchments, and not more than half of those who are destined to seize the works are as yet out of the trenches. So that, in spite of the havoc which the enemy is making, there is, in effect, a solid body of troops steadily ascending the breach, never halting, never wavering.

And if the gaining the crest of that breach had been the task appointed, it was now achieved; for, behold! the foremost ranks of the column are on the summit. But what next? Shall they precipitate themselves into the pitfall prepared for them in front, or shall they turn now to force a side passage through the barriers which shut in the top of the breach, and from behind which the enemy is showering bullets and dealing death? Before a thought can pass through the mind, the whole front rank is down. It is replaced by another, but that too is swept away. A third has no better fate. And so the fight goes. There is a new obstacle now on the crest. It is piled high with English bodies.

Meanwhile, it was not faring much better with the second column of attack, in which our friends L'Estrange and Perrin filled their proper places in the ranks of their regiment. Perrin, not being well of his wound, had no business there; but there he was. “He would like,” he said, “to see who would prevint him. Sure, didn't he know the g'ography of the breach better than any of them!” This column was to make its attack on a part of the breach nearer the hornwork than where the first column was toiling. The wall was in ruins for a long way, but a point selected for their onset was indicated by an angle in the works. They were not, however, to be allowed to reach their angle without a little more opposition than the first column had experienced. It seems that when the attack was first developed, the defenders, knowing that their works were breached in many

¹ Napier.

places, were doubtful as to the precise spot where the push would be made, and spread themselves much over their ramparts. When they saw the direction of the first column, they poured into the works which overlooked the route of our troops. From thence they directed a much augmented fire into our ranks, which was so galling that the allies returned it as they marched. As many Frenchmen as could get room to stand, crowded around the head of the breach on which the second column was directed.

The second column, like the first, ascended stern and unmoved by the murderous fire poured into it from all sides. Like the first, it reached the crest in imposing mass; but although it did not find an equally deep drop behind the rampart, it did find a strong and confining retrenchment, not to be carried by a rush, and from which came a storm of bullets, which swept everything before it. The head of the heavy column was again and again shorn away, but still for a time it moved forward, those in front, as long as they lived, seeking in vain for some practicable chink through which they might force themselves past the barrier.

L'Estrange's regiment came second in this second column. It was a good deal punished; but our two friends were uninjured on the ascent. Nothing could be seen in front for the mass of men, and nothing around them for the smoke. They only knew that they were, though slowly, moving up. There was no rush to indicate that any barrier had given way; it was only too probable that their steps forward were simply into the places of those who had fallen. When they were yet far from the top, a slackening of the upward movement told that the first furious courage of the stormers had received a check. There was no yielding of ground. The stubborn mass still faced the foe and the impracticable rampart; but as the front of it was swept away, there was not the same alacrity to rush forward and fill the place.

After a time the men had not the heart to fill *any* vacant place. Anon those in front, without turning, stepped back a little, and the general movement was away backwards from the certain death in front. While still facing its goal, the mass was gently subsiding.

What has been described as occurring at the second breach may very well be taken as the state of things on the first breach also. The men were not daunted nor beaten back. But, on the other hand, they could not make way. Little by little the columns stood lower on the breaches, where they were out of reach of the dreadful flanking fire which had consumed them on

the crest. And now, too, they sought among the ruins further shelter from the grape and shell which still reached them from other parts of the fortress. They would not turn, but they knew not what to do.

Captain l'Estrange, Lieutenant Perrin, and some half-dozen of their men, had crept under the shadow of a huge block of masonry, and were taking breath. It was the last day of August, insufferably hot, with thunder threatening, and they had been two hours at this terrible work. All used such refreshment as their canteens afforded, and all spoke a little of what had happened and might happen. The men were chiefly communicative concerning comrades who had fallen. Jones was dead; Smith saw him cruelly torn and killed by a round-shot. Robinson had been alive an hour ago; but he couldn't move himself; and with the continual tramp of men over him, it was not to be expected that he survived. Brown had been shot in the neck, could not raise his head, and could not carry his fire-lock, which he had been obliged to abandon; he could, however, walk, and had been seen endeavouring to extricate himself from the advance, and to drop to the rear.

"I mixed this wake," observed Mr Perrin. "I did so purposely, because when the sun is so hot anything stiff is apt to make your head ache."

"If your head stands this infernal din, Pat, and the smoke and dust, without aching, it needn't be timid about a sip of liquor."

"Sure, I don't know that. The noise is conjanial; but the sun and the drink don't agree. Bedad, it's warrum."

"It is; and one really must not regret this little halt. We shall require all the strength we can muster before long."

"We'll get in this time, Fred? Sure, I begin to see now that I couldn't have done it th' other night. It's a hard nut to crack, but we'll crack it."

"I feel certain that there'll be no drawing back this time. Graham will get in, or he'll spend his last man, and die sword in hand."

So they talked on for a time, until at last they grew impatient of their inactivity, when suddenly the blow of a round-shot on the breach above their heads made them start.

"What the devil was that, now?" exclaimed Perrin; "and there another, and another. Be the powers, it came from across the river. It's our own sthupid artillery, that doesn't see we're here still, lying in ambush; and they're firing on the braches again."

"They haven't touched us, Pat."

"They have not, fortunately. But we'll be feeling them just now, the wittings. We'll have to withdraw, not from th' enemy's bolts, but from the attentions of our own guns."

"I don't know, Pat. The gunners seem to be quite aware of what they are doing. They are aiming far above our heads, and are taking a good measure for clearing the way above us. Every gun must now be directed on the crest of the breaches. It's a bold idea, but I believe a good one. It will make a diversion in our favour."

CHAPTER XX.

THE FALL OF SAN SEBASTIAN.

It was even as Captain l'Estrange had suggested. The general in charge of the siege had, from a point of command on the other side of the river, watched the progress of the storm. He had seen his troops in two places gallantly mount the broken wall, their advance files stand triumphant on the crest of it, and then sink down, to be replaced by others who sunk also. "The crowded masses swarmed up the face of the ruins; but on reaching the crest-line, they came down again like a falling wall; crowd after crowd were seen to mount, to totter, to sink. The French fire was unabated, the smoke floated away, and the crest of the breach bore no living man!"¹

It was of course clear to him that some new order must be given, but it was difficult to devise what that order should be. The *attaque de vive force* had once more been given prematurely—before artillery-fire and the sap had sufficiently disabled the enemy and made a way for the assailants. It was all too well demonstrated, by the havoc and the hindrance which were seen, that the defence was still strong, and that by leaving the enemy the use of his limbs, he could take care of his heart. It was rather late in the day, when the stormers were actually on the breaches, to begin to think of taking the hornwork and of subduing the French fire. Yet the idea of doing these things occurred to some of the chiefs, and found acceptance. It was ordered that another column should assail the hornwork; and that the batteries, armed with more than fifty heavy pieces, should plunge their shot into the works, rake their terrepleins (or inner levels, whereon their artillery stood), spread confusion,

¹ Napier.

scare the defenders, and so give another chance to the bold stormers. Why all this was not done before the body of the place was assaulted, no man seems able to tell. Our batteries overlooked great part of the works, the town was within easy range, and the desirableness of ruining the defence, as well as of making practicable breaches, must have been apparent.

The gunners had the range accurately; and no sooner did they get the word to fire over the heads of the stormers on the enemy's lines, than they began to turn the tables on the hitherto successful defenders, and to knock their fortifications about their ears with a vengeance. No longer did the French, from their coignes of vantage, destroy at their leisure, as it were, and feel secure of their fortress. In a few minutes' time several of their guns were dismounted, their gunners maimed and killed, the traverses torn, the musketeers behind them slain or dispersed. Even the loopholed houses inside the ramparts were plunged into and smashed. There has seldom been such a scene of havoc. The iron tempest fell for half an hour.

While it was raging, the stormers could not, of course, go up the breaches; but as soon as it ceased, they once more rushed forward, and endeavoured to gain some advantage from this fearful cannonade.

Some sappers endeavoured now, while the French were temporarily paralysed by the awful fire which they had undergone, to establish a lodgment on the great breach; but in the whirling confusion which had occurred, it could not be discovered where were the bearers of the gabions and other stores which should have contributed to the strength of the work; the fragments of broken masonry were but poor material for it; and before much progress could be made, the enemy, whose wits could not long remain scared by any accident or circumstance of war, were back again at their posts, and the rattle of their musketry was once more audible, now that the thunder of our artillery had ceased.

Our columns of attack, as soon as the battering slackened, once more rushed up, in the hope to struggle in while the enemy was off his guard; but the French were on the crest as soon as they were. There were terrible hand-to-hand fights, but no way was made; and the artillery from the citadel, as also from the hornwork, was able to plunge into our columns, and do terrible execution there. Once more the heads of the attacks began to melt away, as they had done previously to the cannonade. There was another check; and a sense of failure was creeping over the poor fellows who had been so long on the breaches, when those who could look about them were some-

what diverted from their chagrin by a sight which offered itself below. A strong force of Portuguese, seeing that the stormers did not make way, and that more men must be wanted, had come down to the river's bank on the other side, and plunged boldly into the stream. So sudden and decided was their action, that they had advanced some way along the ford before the enemy descried them. But at length they were seen; and immediately guns from the citadel opened upon them with deadly effect. Their loss was terrible, but they were not checked; they came on steadily, and reached the other side, where the battle was raging.

"I will creep forward and try to get a sight of what is going on," L'Estrange said to Pat.

"And, be me sowl, I'll creep with ye," answered Mr Perrin.

"It's mighty slow work waiting here, so it is."

They got out from the ranks, and, working their way among the ruins on the breach, crawling, rolling, gliding, so as not to attract attention, they reached a part of the broken crest which lay between the two attacks. Peering cautiously from among the rubbish, they could see the French at their posts. There had not been time to clear away any of the wreck caused by our artillery, and the scene was fearful to look upon,—torn parapets, dismounted guns, and the bodies and detached limbs of gunners who had been struck at their posts, met their view; but there were men enough still to forbid the passage of our columns beyond the crest. "We are at a standstill; what can we do more? what will be the end of it?" were the young men's thoughts.

All along the interior of the parapets they perceived stores of powder bags, barrels, live shells, and explosives, which the French had accumulated there to use in certain contingencies which had not occurred. These combustibles lay close together, and the thought struck Captain l'Estrange that if a light could be applied to this susceptible line in any part, it might explode for a long way round. He looked about him for some means of ignition. Fire was being poured from every point of the compass; the works were wrapped in fire; and yet it was a problem whence to get a brand that might be thrown on to the tempting train.

"Be J——," said Perrin, "I see behind that second gun that's upset on the left, a thing that looks like the lintstock; there may be fire in it."

"Stop, let me look! By Jove, yes! There's something. That slow match will smoulder for any length of time. I've my two arms, and you have not; so I'll try and explore."

"They're sure to see your red coat, and then good-bye to ye."

"An explosion promises so much good to us, that it's worth while to strip. So I'll take off my coat; and do you take care of it. I'll come back here if I can."

L'Estrange took off his belt and coat, and handed them to his friend. He then made his way, still among the ruins, to the point opposite to the wrecked battery which he had seen. Emerging now from the shelter which the rubbish afforded, he crawled most cautiously among powder barrels and rockets, until he crouched under the shadow of the second gun, which lay turned over on the ground. Moving along in the shadow, he got at and seized the lintstock. Fortunately, the match in it was still burning. It was the work of a moment to blow the match a little, and to place it on the fuse of a live shell. He then plunged once more into the ruins, and made his way back to where Perrin lay expecting him.

Before he was yet within speaking distance of his friend, the shell exploded; then there was a hissing and a rattling; then a barrel of powder went off with an awful booming, attended by a dense cloud of smoke. This had not cleared when the cracking and the roll of the powder explosions became general. There was a conflagration all along the ramparts, and a volume of smoke, which obscured everything.

"Give me my coat and belt; quick, Pat," sung out L'Estrange, no longer obliged to lower his voice, but hardly able to make himself heard for the din. "Come along now; we can make our way anywhere in this smoke."

"Be the powers, ye've done it, me boy. Let's get back. There'll be something on directly."

"Very likely. Let's keep together in the confusion. Will you lend me your knife, Pat? I've an idea of doing something if we get behind those works."

"Take it out of me pocket. You know I can't use me left hand."

While this dialogue was proceeding, and the officers were making their way back to their men, the Frenchmen had been altogether astonished by the din which travelled along their ramparts, and by the awful smoke which sat on the parapets, and hid everything. The sudden racket had startled the English too, but they were not slow to perceive that something detrimental to the enemy had happened, and that the time had come for making another attempt to get within his guard. Already the columns were in motion again. The men had been for four hours on the breaches, and it was an August day in Spain. No wonder, then, that their energy had abated

somewhat. But, fortunately, not very much dash was required, for the French had not got over their consternation, and they could not see what the stormers were about. In a few minutes all this was over, and they were themselves again; but those few minutes had sufficed for deciding the fate of San Sebastian.

Our second column broke in, almost unopposed, over the traverses which had before kept them at bay. They not only gathered thick on the terreplein behind the breach, but were able to mount on to a high cavalier on their left, and to seize its whole length, the few French who showed there being swiftly killed or put to flight.

L'Estrange it was who led the way on to this cavalier, he having, when he went to take the lintstock, observed how the one work was connected with the other. In the cavalier was a salient angle, the highest point in the work; and at this highest point stood a tall flagstaff, carrying the Imperial standard, which the French had hoisted on this great day of the siege to animate the garrison. It was high above the smoke which obscured the ramparts.

"Come this way," L'Estrange shouted to Pat. "Keep your eye on my sword, and give me a leg."

The flag had been fastened to the mast, it having probably been apprehended that halyards might be shot away. L'Estrange, getting his first lift from Pat's sound shoulder, swarmed smartly up the mast, and in three or four minutes reached the bunting. As soon as his head was above the smoke, he was seen from the hornwork, and a dozen muskets were levelled at him. He never would have come down alive had it not been that just then the assailants burst into the hornwork, which they took in reverse, dropping into it from the cavalier. It was the work of an instant to draw out Perrin's knife and to sever the first band of small cord which bound the colour to the masthead. He raised himself high enough to cut one or two more of these, and then, gathering the folds of the flag into his arms, he let himself go for a moment, and slid down with all his weight. With the jerk the flag gave way, and came down. L'Estrange descended in a trice, bearing it with him.

"What shall we do with it now?" said he. "It's too heavy to carry with us."

"I'll tell ye, then, what ye'll do," answered Mr Perrin; "ye'll just snip out a bit with the knife, and then ye'll put the obnoxious thing in here," raising the lid of a portfire box which had remained sound in the salient. "That's it, don't ye see? Now, I'll take care of the scrap for ye; and ye can leave the

main body here. The place, I hope, belongs to us now, so we're securing it in our own coffer."

The disappearance of the flag had been remarked by both sides. It was an incident of considerable importance. The fate of the hornwork was decided by it; for when they saw the flag come down, both assailants and defenders believed that the body of the place had fallen, so that the fall of the outwork was certain. Our men's confidence rose, while the French lost theirs, and the long faces of the hornwork were speedily cleared.

A few minutes more and the allies were pouring into the unhappy town, where the defence was being continued from barricades and houses. The street-fighting did not, however, last long. A tremendous thunderstorm, which had long been gathering above, burst now just as the place fell, and its violence, and the torrents of rain that came down, put out the embers, as it were, of the struggle. Would that one could say that with it ended the bloodshed and the miseries of that dreadful day! But when the fair fighting was over, there began on the part of some of our troops a perpetration of fiendish excesses too dreadful for narration. Discipline was, for a time, quite in abeyance. Officers who attempted to uphold it were put to death, or at the least chased away from the scenes of the atrocities. The five terrible hours upon the breaches had wrought the soldiers' spirits to a fearful pitch, and the reaction from that state of tension led, in the coarser minds, to the disgraceful, infamous conduct at which we have glanced.

Accomplished engineers, eye-witnesses, who have recorded and commented upon the events of this siege, have declared that, if they had been allowed to begin and end the undertaking according to the rules of their art, the final assault might have been unnecessary; or, at the worst, it would have been a less bloody, and a more certain, thing than it was. As it was, the allied army lost before San Sebastian 3500 officers and men, killed and wounded.

CHAPTER XXI

PARDON: I HAVE SINNED.

It is hoped that these military scenes have not quite put out of the reader's mind the little society at Veorse. Things there

had continued much as last we saw them, except that to many people they looked brighter than they had done. It was known that both Major Stanshon and Captain l'Estrange had survived the glorious battle of Vittoria, and there was much joy accordingly. There were signs also that the long, weary war might be brought to an end at no distant date. Patient, longing hearts were beginning to be cheered. Hope within them was growing more lively; coming happiness took more distinct forms. The night of heaviness was far spent, the day was at hand.

Will it astonish any reader if we say that the person who, of all in Veorse, most brightened at the good news and the clearing prospect was Una Clowance? It was so, whether the truth astonish or not. There was in Una's soul such a confidence that everything was working for the best, and her whole temperament so harmonised with her belief, that she was ready always to rejoice with them that did rejoice. No such thought ever occurred to her as that the peace which was to bring so much felicity to many, would be accompanied by no good thing for her. She was glad for everybody's gladness; thought that her own chances of happiness must necessarily be improved when there was gladness all round her.

Winter was drawing near once more, and there was a fire burning in the grate, near which Una and Doris were sitting. Doris leant her head on her hand. She had been weeping.

"Before all these battles took place," complained Doris, "I never thought about the danger. I felt sure that nothing ill would happen to *him*. But now that this terrible battle has been fought, and now that we understand something of what that dreadful siege was, I feel more anxious and miserable than ever I did in my life."

"Yes, and how weak of you!" answered Una. "You know that he not only escaped these great perils, but that he gained honour in them; and that nothing could tend more directly to the fulfilment of your wishes. As your troubles approach their end, you grow sad. I'm sure that isn't right."

"Though so much and such awful fighting is over, I know that there will be more. And the accounts we have read of the battles that have been make me tremble for those that are to come. He has escaped so far. It seems to have been by miracle alone that anybody could escape. And how can I hope that he will always be preserved?"

"He will. I am sure he will. You will see that he will," answered Una. "Perhaps by this time next year he will be in

Veorse once more, sitting among us as of old, and helping you to sketch pictures of the future."

Doris's face brightened at this suggestion, and she was inclined to enter into the delight of it; but her smile could not be steadfast, and the sad thoughts crowded back again.

"Oh, how can any of them live!" said she. "There is all that shooting and stabbing, and, as if that were not enough, there is riding them down with horses, and blowing them up with gunpowder. It's too dreadful!"

"I daresay," answered Una; "but what is the use of dwelling upon such horrid things? Think less about the events of warfare, and more about the end of it. A vast number do escape, however they manage it, and, depend upon it, a certain friend of ours will be preserved."

"Those breaches, Una; they have an odd name, but they must be something more terrible than can be conceived. Imagine the bullets falling literally in showers, the burning houses, the furious enemy, and the mines and fireworks!"

"Imagine nothing about them, my dear. We don't understand these things, and can only torture ourselves with thinking of them. There was no great battle for a year before Vittoria, and there may not be another before the end of the war. And there cannot be many more sieges, for all the towns must be taken."

"So many evil chances seem to stand in the way of his safe return. How I wish I could shut out all these anxieties, and look only to the happy end! But I dream about fighting, and see men bleeding and suffering agonies."

"You will laugh at all this some day, when he will be by your side. He will come back, my dear, you may rely upon it, and all will be more than well."

"He *may* come back sound, but I cannot see that he must," said Doris, thinking of Una's own disappointment, and wondering how she could speak so confidently.

"I cannot see that he must *not*; and, until I do see some reason for not expecting him, I will not even think of his not appearing at the proper time. Only think, Doris, he was but a simple lieutenant when he left us, and now he is a major! Such good fortune is more than we could have dared to hope for a twelvemonth ago. Now, if things have gone so much better than you expected, how can you be so silly as to think badly or even doubtfully of the future—how can you dare to do it?"

"It is a great step," said Doris, beginning to be a little charmed by Una's complacency. "It will give him the competence that he used to talk of. He is a great officer now, isn't

he—greater than any one that lives about here? There is nobody in our neighbourhood of greater rank than a captain; and I hear that many who are called captains here are not so in reality.”

“He is of higher rank than any captain in the *army*,” said little Una, with emphasis and dignity; “but a captain in the *navy* is different. A major is *not* greater than he.”

“Oh, really; I did not know.” Doris feared that they were approaching tender ground, and sought to lead away from it. “Mrs Stanshon tried to make me understand what it was that he did, and that was considered so meritorious. But I don’t think she knew very well herself; at any rate, she didn’t make me understand very clearly.”

“It would be strange if she did. Wait for him to explain it. He will make it clear enough, I warrant you. Meanwhile, be content with knowing that it was a very brave action, and something even better than that, for it was a brave action which showed judgment and knowledge, and one which greatly affected the result of that great storming battle, or whatever they call it.”

“Well, I will try and look only at the bright side, for there certainly is a bright side; but such anxieties do try one’s patience, heigh-ho!”

“My dear,” said Una, “I have known people whose patience was tried more than yours has been, or, as I hope, ever will be; but I should have despised them if they had shown so little trust in Providence and in themselves, and—and—in others, as to look at their lot as only a melancholy tale.”

Here the door opened, and Miss Clowance entered, but not at all in her ordinary way. Her looks astonished the two younger people. Miss Clowance was quite pale, and there was a large tear on either of her cheeks. She did not walk quite steadily; but she managed to totter up to Una, and to kiss her twice emphatically, as she held her close pressed. Then she went back, and sank into a seat. Una and Doris were for the moment so stunned by the apparition, as it seemed to them, that they found no voice until Miss Clowance was seated. Then they cried out together—

“Sister, sister, oh dear! what is it?” and—

“Oh, aunt Dorothy, how you look! I’m sure somebody must be dead!”

Of course they ran to her. But Miss Clowance could not speak immediately; or, it may be suspected that she did not choose to speak until she could command her voice, and speak to the purpose. She motioned to them with her hands, however, to resume their seats.

"My dears, there is nobody dead; indeed, nothing sad has happened at all. I don't know why I am so weak; it is old age coming, I suppose. But there is really no bad news at all. Only Percival has just come in with a letter that he has received, and it has given us a little shock, from being unexpected, you know, not otherwise."

"And you are not ill, sister?"

"Not in the least, my dear. I ought to be able to say that I never was better; but, somehow, I get upset now without any very good reason."

"May we know?"

"Why, yes, you may know. It was for that I came to you; but Percival and Eleanor would like you to come down that we may discuss his news together."

The stairs were not broad enough for three to descend abreast, so Una took her sister's arm, and Doris followed. Dorothy, who had a general idea that her business was to help others, not to be helped, made some resistance to the proffered support, but not so strenuously as she might have done if her mind had been unoccupied. When they entered the room below, Miss Eleanor was seen on a chair by the hearth, with red eyes and tears on her face, but at the moment laughing. It was clear from her position—her feet were protruded, and her head thrown back—that she was slightly hysterical. Percival Clowance stood on the rug with his back to the fire, holding an open letter in one hand, and fidgeting somewhat, not exhibiting the magnificent repose with which a lord of creation often takes possession of the chimney front.

Eleanor, when she saw Una, held her arms out in an unmistakable way towards her, but did not speak. Una, understanding the invitation, approached the arms, and was immediately enfolded therein, wept over, and caressed, while Eleanor, in broken utterances and not in monotone, quavered forth: "Always said. Knew it, knew it. My dear, dear Una. Said it from the first, now didn't I, my dear?"

Percival now came and gravely kissed his sister Una, then he kissed Doris, and, Miss Clowance having by this time subsided into a chair, he began to speak, though not so quietly and collectedly as he was wont to do in the pulpit.

"Una, my dear," said he, "I think you had better sit down. Doris, won't you sit down? There is something come—that is, I have something to tell you, and—and perhaps you had better sit down. I told Dorothy and Eleanor a little while since, and we agreed that it would be better to have all our party together. And, Una, you are a brave girl, and will know how to receive

what I have got to say, and I am sure—but, however,—the fact is, I received a letter, this letter, this morning. It is from a person whom we all knew—that is, Doris didn't, but except Doris, whom we all knew once very well. We have also felt very angrily towards him, and I know not whether any of us retains enough regard for him to make this letter at all welcome. Yet here the letter is, and however we may feel toward the writer, there can be no doubt that it affords great satisfaction to hear him——”

“Oh, Percival, tell the child,” put in Miss Clowance, “or let me.”

“I wished to break the matter as gently as was consistent with——”

“Una, my dear,” said Dorothy, “the letter is from Captain Oakley.”

Una, whose shoulders had been rising and falling in a marked manner during the last few minutes, did not lose her self-possession, but even smiled gently as she said, “I have been thinking that it might be so. Where is he? Has anything happened to him?”

“He is on shore,” answered Percival; “you shall know where directly. And what has happened to him is, that he has seen the error of his ways, and is anxious to amend them, if it be not too late.”

“I never heard of anything in his ways but what was brave and noble. His ideas may not be quite the same as those of other people, but they may be right for all that. I am sure he will never be too late if there is any duty to be done.”

Una said this with a firm voice, and with a countenance only a little downcast; but though she controlled herself in these respects, she trembled all over. Miss Clowance saw her agitation, and laid her hand on Una's arm. Doris would have run to her, only her hand was fast in a convulsive clasp of aunt Eleanor's.

“My dear Una,” said Dorothy, softly, “will you take the letter to your own room and read it there? You will perhaps bear the consideration of the matter better in that way.”

Una paused an instant. She was probably neither hesitating nor considering, but only gathering strength to answer resolutely. “No, sister,” at length she said, “he has written nothing but what everybody may hear. I will sit here while it is read.”

Percival was going to speak again, but Miss Clowance motioned to him to read the letter, and he read it without further introduction. It was as follows:—

"MY DEAR SIR,—I do not venture to write 'My dear Clowance' until I know how you will receive a letter from me. But I really hope that you will not see reason to treat me as a very dishonourable cruiser; for what has appeared unfair or unhand-some in my conduct has been in a great measure (I do not say altogether) the effect of accidents. I never was, in my heart, false to your sister Una; I never ceased to love her, and I defy any one to say that I have ever, during the long years since I saw you, ranged alongside of any other sail.

"Una (if I may so call her) is still to me the sweetest little being that ever existed; and I'll be ~~dam~~ (I beg your pardon) hanged if I can tell how I managed to be content with a single berth so long, and to live without her. Full explanation would make a long yarn; but let me say in brief, that I was for many months prevented from writing or signalling to Veorse by pure mischances of the service, and if I did not do so as soon as I could, it was from a feeling of awkwardness at having cut so rakish a figure. My sister afterwards reproached me bitterly for what was, in the beginning of it, my cursed misfortune; and this, I am afraid, hardened my heart against my duty, instead of inducing me to do it. Your sister's only rival has been 'the service,' to which I have devoted myself entirely. Many and many a time have I yearned for a renewal of my intercourse with her family and her, and many and many a resolve have I taken to bring to, confess, and ask for pardon; but some action was sure to come athwart me to engross all my mind, and to make me postpone my penitence till the new danger should be past.

"I have now been taken off the roll of active officers in a way which I shouldn't have chosen. You have read, doubtless, of the little Aiguille's action off Brest with the French small frigate Estelle. Aiguille brought her into Plymouth, but a good many of us got roughly handled, and I was so damaged in some of my works as to make me fear that I might be laid up in ordinary for life, and to oblige me to come hither and give myself up to the doctors. But they tell me now, thank God, that I may be all right and fit for sea again after a little longer spell. Meanwhile His Majesty has given me post-rank, and the right of putting some letters after my name.

"But I have had many days of pain and confinement in this limbo, and in the long watches have taken counsel with my own heart; the result of which is, that I seize this first opportunity of the doctor allowing me to write, to say to you how strongly I feel the disloyalty of which (in conduct only) I have been guilty; to say, also, how my chief and only desire now is to be

allowed to show myself before your sister Una, to win her forgiveness, and to be accepted by her for her husband.

"I hope now that I may soon be allowed to weigh anchor, and, if you tell me that I may make my number in Veorse, and plead my own cause with sweet Una, I will be under way on the very day that I escape the doctor's hands. Your reply will be expected with impatience. That it may be merciful and encouraging is the earnest wish of, my dear sir, your friend once, and ready to be so again,

FELIX OAKLEY."

The parson ceased. All eyes were turned on Una. Eleanor sobbed something about "Can't think how we ever," and, "Of course an officer and a gentleman would be sure to," to which nobody attended. Then Una said firmly—

"He will be welcome here, will he not?"

"That is mainly for you to say, dear," answered Percival.

"Then let him come without loss of a moment. I have never spoken or thought of forbidding him."

"No, you have not. That is quite true," said Dorothy. "Let him come and speak for himself, if you are willing so far to favour him; but our treatment of him must depend on what he has to say. We are not ready to receive him with open arms at present."

"I do not fear for the result," said Una. "You will write at once, Percival, will you not? And you will bid him to come simply, and leave discussion and contention until they can be held by word of mouth."

"Exactly what I should have proposed," said Percival. "I will write briefly telling him to come, but letting him see that the whole question concerning which he will come stands over, and will have to be very clearly answered before he can count us as friends."

"That will do. I am not apprehensive," answered Una.

"I will write at once, and show you the letter."

"No, I don't want to see it; but write."

When the conference thus came to an end, Una rose and moved towards the door. Doris looked at her, inquiring whether she wanted company, but got no encouragement to follow. Miss Clowance made a little sign as Una retired, and when she had fairly left them, said: "The danger from the shock is past now, I think. Leave her to herself for a little, poor dear. I will go to her before long. How well the girl behaved; she is quite a heroine!"

Then tongues were loosed and spoke freely. There was a rush of ideas to be put into words. Facts, suppositions, fore-

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Then tongues were loosed and spoke freely. There was a rush of ideas to be put into words. Facts, suppositions, fore-

casts, were made to jostle each other in the great conflict of thoughts, new considerations arising every moment, and a fresh remark forming itself before its predecessor was uttered. The excitement was great, for a (to them) most important event had occurred. Eleanor shook off her nervousness, and was as eloquent as anybody. Their eyes sparkled, their cheeks glowed. They were hardly like the staid and reserved Clowances; but none of us is him, or her, self at all times. After a little, Percival remembered that he was to write at once, and this caused the ebullition to subside.

CHAPTER XXII.

SUSPICION OF ANOTHER TREASON.

Only Una herself knew how she passed her seclusion after she had heard the letter read. Her thoughts seemed always to be more in order than is customary with the world at large, and she was not subject to tumultuous emotions. But her affections were deep, if they were not demonstrative; if her happiness was under control, it was none the less genuine happiness. She had been as ready as any of her house to cease to mention Oakley's name; it does not follow that she thought of him less persistently than she had done before; only it was impossible for the others to guess what was passing in her mind. They hoped she was forgetting; but every now and then would appear some sign that the hope was baseless. Doris probably knew more than anybody of the real state of her heart, and Doris regarded her, or had till now regarded her, as constant and loving to a fault—as carrying faith and constancy to an extravagant pitch. Doris used to feel quite angry sometimes, and to think to herself that if Captain Oakley were rightly served, not only would Una hate and despise him, but he would be overtaken by sharp punishment for his perfidy.

There was reason to think that Una had never regarded her own case as desperate; consequently she was the least surprised of them all at the turn which matters had so suddenly taken. It might have been gathered from her words in the drawing-room just now that she had no controversy to hold with her own heart touching what her dignity, her wrong, and her affection might demand or concede among one another. All that seemed

to be entirely adjusted, and Una's course clear before her. If it were so, she had only now to try and realise her great happiness, and to be thankful for it.

Miss Clowance, it might be an hour after the assembly of the family in the drawing-room, found her sister quite composed, and ready to converse. Una was reclining, but gave no other evidence of being indisposed. She smiled affectionately when she saw who her visitor was.

"My dear," said Dorothy, "I did not like to leave you longer by yourself. I hope I haven't disturbed you. But I thought you ought to have something, and I brought a cup of tea. Perhaps a glass of wine would be better. Or shall I beat up an egg, and mix it with——"

"Thank you, sister. I am quite well, and really do not require anything," answered Una; "only, as you have brought the tea, I will not be so ungracious as to refuse it." And thereupon she sat up, and began to speak cheerfully on any subject which Miss Clowance introduced. All that could be said had been said concerning Oakley. The next move was with him. And now that Una was seen to be perfectly well and calm, things had just to subside into the state in which they were before the letter arrived, and the family awaited the next incident in the love story.

And that was not long in presenting itself. As fast as the post could bring it came a second letter to Percival from Captain Oakley, thanking him for his reply. The writer said that he had been tempted to write this time to Una herself, but on consideration he thought he should best fulfil the conditions on which he was permitted again to appear at Miss Clowance's house, if he refrained from every attempt to favour his cause until he could do so in person, with the entire sanction of the family. He added that his health was improving, that the favourable answer which he had received from Percival was better medicine than any that the doctors could give him, and that he would fly towards Veorse on the very day when he might be relieved from restriction.

Una and Doris both thought his letters delicious. There was just enough salt about them to give the utmost flavour; while there was not a word indicative of coarseness, or a sentiment other than what it ought to be.

"We must not regard one little word in it which is not exactly *comme il faut*, because he himself saw the impropriety of it, and made a scratch across it," said Doris.

"One little word!" echoed Una, with a severity not usual. "It would be unbecoming in one of *us* to write so; but to men,

to officers, it is quite permitted. It is thought dashing. It is almost inseparable from men of spirit. I am told that the great General in the Peninsula uses what is called very strong language."

"I hope," shuddered Doris, "that his officers do not imitate him in that respect."

"You may rely upon it, my dear, that they do. There is nothing so fascinating as success in arms. The admirers of great leaders—and all of their own profession are their admirers—not only desire to imitate their great deeds, which is not so easy to do, but to copy their peculiarities, and there they often succeed. If a very great man halts in his gait, little men of his following cultivate a stagger; and if he happens to have a cast in his eye, squinting is in fashion."

The ideas which had for years been gathering in Una's mind, but which during her long trial had been kept fast shut in that innocent repository, seemed now to be peeping forth as the flowers do when the sunshine begins to be felt. It was astonishing how the damsel had for years avoided allusion to fighting and to navigation. But now the embargo seemed to be taken off, and the silver tongue, which could discourse so prettily about other matters, allowed itself to speak of arms, and men, and ships. Una had treasured, no doubt, some lively recollections of the nautical style, both in speech and manners, as it was some six or seven years ago, and to her mind it was delightful. It should be said, however, in justice to Oakley, that he was not remarkable for his inordinate addiction to salt-water phrases or to nautical *abandon*. Among sailors he seemed, as to style, hardly to be purified from the taint of the land; it was when he was on shore, and cruising among muslin, that his dark-blue aroma came delicately out, so as to spice his speech and acts, and to make him, to some minds, bewitching.

And as to Doris Adair's gentle apprehension, that if the great Wellington sometimes permitted himself to be "full of strange oaths" (although he certainly did not approve of being "bearded like the pard"), the smaller luminaries of the Peninsular army might also sometimes let drop an imprecation, it must be admitted that the troops generally did interlard their conversation, their short remarks, and even their words of command, with embellishments drawn red-hot from the bottomless pit, and put, smoking and dripping lava, into their speech. Many, it was thought, were satisfied that it was a necessary part of a campaign, and so resigned themselves to the inevitable, tolerating swearing as they did bloodshed. But in these days there is a heresy which maintains that a war may be prosecuted, as many

declarations are now legally made, by simple affirmation or denial—at any rate, that the communications of the officers may be diluted to yea-and-nay strength, without prejudice to military operations. And this schism has led the sticklers for orthodoxy and the old school, the extreme ritualists, as they may be called, of military phraseology, to institute a scrutiny into the conduct of past wars, so that an accurate estimate may be formed of the value of cursing as a military element. In the course of this investigation it has been ascertained that, during the wars which followed the French Revolution, the wholesome influence of what is generally termed “bad language” was fully recognised, and much success and great glory seem to have attended that method. Next, there is every reason to believe that in earlier wars under the Georges, as the American wars, the expeditions led or instigated by the Pretenders, the campaigns in Canada, and so on, due attention was paid to this important point; also that our failure to redeem the American colonies may have resulted from the fact of the Americans having sworn and blasphemed with greater power and ingenuity than ourselves. Looking still farther back, we have the testimony of Lieutenant Shandy, to the effect that our armies “swore terribly in Flanders;” and all other evidence, as is understood, concurs in establishing the prevalence of malediction under Marlborough. Beyond this there is not so clear proof of the military services being pre-eminent in this line; but that may in great measure be explained by the proficiency in those days attained by society at large, or, at any rate, by personages who professed to lead society about the time of the Restoration. For, in respect to these, Lord Macaulay tells us that “the new breed of wits and fine gentlemen never opened their mouths without uttering ribaldry of which a porter would now be ashamed, and without calling on their Maker to curse them, sink them, confound them, blast them, and damn them.”¹

Under these circumstances, one sees that it would have been difficult for the military services specially to distinguish themselves in imprecatory phrases. The report of the examining body is not yet issued, but it is expected to throw a flood of light on this interesting subject. Meanwhile, it would be presumptuous to anticipate their conclusions, and indeed the story cannot be detained by anything more than this cursory notice of the inquiry, for there is much to say about what was going on in Veorse.

Mrs Stanshon had not come to visit the Clowance family since the receipt of Oakley's first repentant letter. It was probable

¹ Macaulay's ‘History,’ vol. i. p. 400.

that, had she known of that letter, she would have communicated with them; but whether she were in the secret of it or not, she had been so true a friend, and had behaved with such honourable decision when Una's trouble was fresh, that they now, on the second letter coming to hand, considered it a duty to offer their confidence to her.

It was Miss Clowance and Percival who called. Mrs Stan-shon knew scarcely anything about her brother. She had of course heard of the Aiguille's exploit, and she had read in the gazettes that Oakley was wounded; but she had no idea that his wound was so severe, neither was she aware of his having been at Haslar. Her satisfaction was great at finding that he was fast recovering health; but her delight at learning his continued truth to Una, and the voluntary renewal of his allegiance, was almost more than she could express. After her astonishment had a little passed, and her joy was growing calmer, "I always knew," she said, "that Felix would never be deliberately false. Time, you see, has proved me to have been right about his principles, although time has been so long about the proof that I own to having become a doubter myself."

"Shall you write to Captain Oakley?"

"I cannot exactly answer; but I think not. If he had wanted my aid, or my advice, or my sympathy, he would have written to me. He probably will prefer to manage his affairs in his own way. At any rate, he will be here soon, and I shall see him. But, again, I must tell you how delighted I am. I must come at once and rejoice with your sister Una. I should have been with you before, only for—only for—my husband's letter, you know. I didn't wish to discuss any unpleasant subject, and I could hardly keep silent about affairs at the seat of war. And poor dear Miss Adair, how is she? Is she able to enter into her aunt's feelings, and participate in the recovered happiness?"

"Miss Adair, thank you, is quite well, and much delighted at the prospect of happiness for my sister. She is occasionally anxious and perhaps cast down at the sad news which comes now and again from Spain; but, on the whole, she keeps up bravely. You continue, I hope, to get good advices from Colonel Stan-shon?"

"My dear husband is quite well; but he is, of course, disappointed and fretted. Things have turned out so differently from what we expected. But I will not dwell on that. I will think only of the good news regarding my brother. Has he told you about what day he may be expected?"

"No, he has not. It depends on the doctors."

"Dorothy," said Percival Clowance that evening to his sister, "human nature is very selfish, as I often tell my congregation. You and I, when we went to Mrs Stanshon, were so full of our own affairs, and the pleasant turn which they have taken, that we hardly gave a thought to some remarks which she made about herself and her husband. I have since been thinking over the visit, and I fancy she was ill at ease about something, and that the cause of her discomposure is connected with the campaign, for she hinted that her husband was a little gloomy too."

"Bless my heart! so she did, Percival. Yes, I remember that she said something. It does not distinctly occur to me what it was. I ought to have shown more sympathy. Truly, I am very sorry. I must try and see her again in a day or two, and let her see that we are not indifferent to her affairs. She said (did she not?) that the Colonel was quite well."

"She did. Yes; that was all right. I don't know that we were very remiss as regarded their affairs. We had no right to question her about matters which she might not wish to communicate. But on thinking over our conversation, it strikes me that there was something mentioned which rather grated upon my mind for the moment, though it was immediately put aside by recurrence of the idea of which our heads were full—I mean Oakley's coming."

"Dear me! I recollect nothing which appeared to concern us in particular. She made it appear that something was troubling Major—I mean Colonel Stanshon."

"I allude, Dorothy, to her having, after speaking of something unpleasant at the seat of war, immediately inquired, in rather a marked way, after Doris Adair. Poor Miss Adair she called her, or something of that sort."

"You don't say so! Oh, I think you must be mistaken, Percival! I did not notice it. And besides, what could she have heard? The last accounts, as we know, were more than good. Everything favourable as regarded Mr l'Estrange. I still call him Mr. I can't think of that lad as a major. Oh, I hope that you are needlessly alarmed!"

"It may be so, and I hope so. But we should, I think, ascertain whether everything was well by last accounts, and take care that, if any unpleasant rumour should be floating about, it may not reach our niece's ears. Mrs Stanshon did not mention L'Estrange, as she generally does. There is mostly something from her husband's letter which we are told, in order that we may repeat it."

"That is true. Well, let us think how we may best ascertain whether people are saying anything, and if so, what they are saying."

Now, people *were* saying something; and if the Clowance mind had not been unusually preoccupied, the saying could hardly have been hid from it. The world of Veorse did not know anything of Captain Oakley's awakened allegiance, and so could not interest itself therein; but that it had other fare on which to sustain itself, will now be shown.

To Mr Millis, the sucking barrister, was Veorse indebted for a great deal of the *pabulum* on which its curiosity subsisted. This little man had an inquiring mind as regarded his neighbours' affairs, and a knack of hitting ingeniously anything like a blot in anybody's game. We know what resulted from the fall of an apple when an inquiring mind addressed itself to that rather common occurrence: in the same way, commonplace matters, which would scarcely have engaged an ordinary person's attention, often furnished to Mr Millis the germs of striking facts, which afterwards expanded to prevailing gossip, and resulted perhaps in injurious exposures. Many a busybody had been astonished by Mr Millis's acuteness, and many a victim of ridicule or worse had cursed Mr Millis for a meddling little monkey.

It had happened just a few days before the receipt of Oakley's letter by Clowance, that Mr Millis had been filling his little sugar-basin with the second half of a pound of refined sugar. There were high duties in those days, which made sugar expensive. Mr Millis, fidgety in most things, prided himself especially on his domestic economy; and he kept his sugar and such treasures locked in his cupboard, and himself dispensed them for use at convenient seasons. Some thick coloured paper, which had contained the sugar, he threw into the grate after he had shaken out the dust, and a piece of a *Growcester* newspaper, which had formed the outer envelope of the parcel, he was about to dispose of similarly, when he felt prompted to run his eye over it. On one of the columns he saw the heading, "Warlike Intelligence," and beneath he read how a hundred and fifty wounded and diseased men had been landed from the transport ship *Alexander*; how his Royal Highness the Prince Regent had been pleased to make appointments to the command of certain regiments, of which the colonels had been killed in action or promoted; how the prisoners made at the taking of San Sebastian would be sent on arrival to Mill-bay and Dartmoor; and how draughts were to be despatched immediately to reinforce the army in the Pyrenees,

where casualties were very frequent. This, besides being a week old, was a kind of news that was only too common. Mr Millis could not go on reading it word by word, but he let his eye skim along the lines, and, seeing that the whole appeared equally uninteresting, was once more about to toss the bit of paper into the fire, when, as it was leaving his hand, he caught sight of the words "Affair of Honour," and arrested his act. What could it mean? The paragraph to which his eye had been directed was as follows:—

"We are informed that the demand made by a foreign officer of the allied army on one of our British heroes, and which had reference to a lady of some diplomatic skill, resulted in a personal encounter and in bloodshed, though, happily, not in loss of life. Major L—— (or should it be written l——?) has since greatly distinguished himself at the taking of San Sebastian, and received field rank for his gallantry. Of course we here mean his gallantry in the field; but it is necessary to explain, as he seems to be devoted to Venus as well as to Mars. Our notice of the 11th instant would now appear to have been substantially correct."

Now, Mr Millis had a keen and quick scent for anything scandalous. His constructive mind began immediately to collate the hints which the paragraph contained, and he thought there must be some local reason why an editor in the Furze Range had thought it worth while to extract it. Fired with suspicion, thinking that he had caught the odour of something which might make many ears in Veorse to tingle, he was greatly exercised for a few days with the consideration of how he might get a full grasp of the story, which was as yet tantalising him with nods and winks, as it were. Many a man so fretted would have taken counsel with another, but that was by no means Mr Millis's method. He liked monopoly in news until it was mature and ready for publication; he guarded his bit of rumour like a Bluebeard, and would not for any advantage have admitted a partner into the concern. Thus, confining himself to his own resources, he was puzzled as to how the mystery should be fathomed. He asked his grocer, of course, whether he had happened to preserve the newspaper number of the 11th instant, and was informed that it had long ago left the shop with raisins or sugar in its embrace. His cautious inquiries all about the town did not a bit help him to the sheet which he wanted. A letter to the editor demanding the back number, brought only the reply that, except the copy on his own file, the editor had not one left. But he had that one. Mr Millis would go to Growcester and inspect that copy. And he went.

On a rough day, with a south-easter in his face, the little lawyer, enveloped like a mummy (he piqued himself on his wraps), drove over in an open carriage, and made his way to the office. Thus, after many days, he found the back number of the 11th instant, and was richly rewarded for his pains. Some news-giver or vendor from the camp had given one of the current accounts of the adventure of Captain l'Estrange with the Senhora Valdez. The newspaper had very thinly veiled the transaction. The names were not given in full, but the regiment was very fully indicated. Mr Millis came back from his excursion with a copy of the paragraph in his pocket, and a conviction in his heart that he had got hold of something startling, and that L'Estrange was the hero of it.

Before a meeting of his most confidential friends, which he summoned for the next evening, he laid the evidence that he had procured, naming no name, and assuming to be true only exactly what had been stated in the newspaper. "They are remarkable paragraphs, to say the least of them," said Mr Millis, after submitting his documents; "and as we have acquaintances, not to say friends, now serving with the army, and in the gallant regiment which has here been named, we cannot fail to feel an interest in the affair. I have my own opinion as to the person who may be indicated as the British officer who took part in the duel, and you all, doubtless, may have yours. If it be as I think, trouble is, I fear, in store for a family which we much respect, and which, as I understand, has been singularly unfortunate in regard to matrimonial engagements. This I shall regret exceedingly. The story may not be true. And then, again, ladies are sometimes forgiving in regard to these breaches of faith. The public scandal, however, is against his obtaining pardon, and the family which will judge his case has plenty of spirit."

Mr Millis's friends all said that they had their own opinions, and that they apprehended disappointment to a high-minded and rather proud family. They appeared to be the most cautious and strictly impartial judges of a disagreeable report which they would rather not have been privy to. Yet somehow the next day it was believed by a large proportion of the population of Veorse, that Mr l'Estrange, the young officer who had been well known there a twelvemonth since, and whom many believed to be the faithful admirer of a Veorse lady, had disappointed expectation by turning out to be one of the most heartless and treacherous of military flirts; that he had abused the hospitality of a Spanish grandee, one of our gallant and devoted allies; that he had run away with the wife of

the said grandee ; that he had been challenged to mortal combat in the natural course of things ; and that he had completed his villany by taking the life of the injured husband. Some people remarked on the story, that it had been the fashion to think well of that young man, but for their parts they always thought him artful ; others said it was fortunate that he had shown himself in his true colours before he came to claim Miss Adair for his wife, and they hoped she had forgotten the good-for-nothing fellow by this time ; while some, really grieved and disappointed, declared that after that young man proving false, it would be impossible to trust any one of his sex.

While Veorse was becoming a little inebriated with this scandal, the Clowance family had its attention pretty fully engaged by Una's affairs, and did not note that the town was slightly off its head, far less did it suppose that Doris and her lover were being dealt with by everybody's tongue. They were not, however, to be spared the knowledge of the rumour, and the consequences of the knowledge. Miss Clowance went to Mrs Stanshon, as she had said that she would, and, after a little conversation with her, was informed that Colonel Stanshon's letter had expressed much concern regarding Major l'Estrange's conduct, and had left her to suppose it to have been as bad as the newspapers and all the world were saying.

The newspapers and all the world ! Why were the newspapers and all the world occupying themselves with Major l'Estrange, and what were they saying ?

Then it all came out. Mrs Stanshon couldn't have imagined that they heard nothing of the case, or of course she would never have alluded to it in their hearing. The reports in circulation were not all precisely the same, but they agreed in the main points. They were becoming somewhat stale now, but they had been the main topic of the busy world. She herself had first heard the subject mentioned by Mrs Tittel. People naturally came to her, thinking that she might be able to confirm or to contradict it with authority.

Of course this made Miss Clowance unhappy, and operated as a sad drawback to the satisfaction which Oakley's repentance had raised. She consulted her brother, and he exerted himself to trace the scandal to its source, and found difficulty in doing so. At length the origin seemed to be traced to Mr Millis's apartments, some unready blundering propagator of it having been driven to confess that he first learned the story at a little symposium there. Percival thereupon referred to Millis, who,

with a winning candour, assured him that, as regarded L'Estrange, that young man's name had never been mentioned by himself, or by any visitor of his, in connection with a piece of news which had come to his knowledge. That he had seen, and shown to others, some announcements of the 'Growcester Gazette,' he was quite ready to admit. They were much at Mr Clowance's service, if he pleased. The statements were by no means explicit, and Mr Millis could not imagine who had presumed to interpret them as applicable to their esteemed acquaintance L'Estrange.

The interview with Percival gave Mr Millis extreme satisfaction. He was able to show that he alone was in possession of the documents on which all this talk had arisen, while at the same time he could solemnly declare that he had never encouraged or suggested the application to anybody living of the newspaper's mysterious utterances.

Percival and Miss Clowance consulted anxiously over the paragraphs, and entertained great fear that they referred to L'Estrange. Mrs Stanshon's information was unfortunately confirmatory rather than otherwise of their suspicion. It was an untoward apprehension to have fretting them just when other matters seemed to be looking bright; but that is the way in this world.

"It may not be true, Percival, after all."

"It may not, certainly. We have nothing tangible as yet."

"Young men are the plagues of existence."

"Well, they cause anxiety sometimes."

"We must keep this strictly from dear Doris for the present."

"Certainly; from Eleanor and Una, too, if that can be managed."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PENITENT. HOW FAME FLIES.

"Don't buy it to-day," said Doris.

"Not to-day?" answered Una. "Why, it is a beautiful day, we have nothing particular to do, and there will be plenty of time to choose before it is dark."

"But you will be getting everything new soon. Why not wait for the great outfit that is coming?"

"My dear, the winter will not wait. I must get a warm

tippet, or positively I shall not be able to go out of doors at all after a day or two. The church is so cold that I shall have to stay at home next Sunday if I am not well wrapped. So come; let us see what Mrs Rugge has got to sell. I am for fur myself, if I can get a fur one to my fancy."

"Velvet, as they now line it, is just as warm, and it is far less common. I don't know but I should like velvet better."

"Remember that those Miss Prinketts came out in velvet last week. One wouldn't like to appear to copy them."

"No, certainly. But it may be velvet, yet still very unlike theirs."

"Well, come now at once, and let us see what there is to choose from."

It has been reckoned that Una and Doris spent quite an hour and a half in Mrs Rugge's establishment. They declared that they were not twenty minutes on the premises; but that is proved to have been an error, because their passage homewards across the great gates of the inn was coincident with the arrival of a chaise which, turning sharp in, barred their way for a minute; and the time of it completing its journey was well known to the post-boy, who got handsomely fee'd for having accomplished it in a given time. A head, surmounted by a gold-laced cap, was protruded from the chaise window as it made its turn; then, in a moment, it was within the archway of the inn, and the ladies were free to pass on.

"Some foreign envoy going to the coast," said Una. "Oh, how I hope that the countries of Europe may among them be able to secure the return of peace!"

"Oh dear, I wish it too! And there are so many of these statesmen, or whatever they are, passing now, that——"

"Una, my little darling," said a voice. And there was beside them, and seizing both of Una's hands, a handsome man in a naval uniform, with epaulets on his shoulders and a round undress cap on his head.

Una did not speak, but her colour came and went, and her hands remained passive in the hands of the new-comer. Doris was frightened, opened her bright eyes, and did not understand the situation for a minute or so.

"Una, my sweet, you are not a bit altered, or only altered for the better. I knew you the instant I looked from the chaise. Say a word to me, say that you are glad to see me."

"Yes, I am glad," murmured Una; "but you are pale and worn."

"Blessings on you for that," said he, replying to the first part of her remark. "But I am transgressing in speaking to you at all

until I have met your relations. However, I could not help it when I came so in your way, if my life had depended on restraining myself. Now, I won't lose a moment in doing everything that is regular and proper; and I hope to be at your dear side again with everybody's approval before dark. Forgive this sudden greeting in the street. You are going towards home, I suppose."

"You look pale and thin," repeated Una.

"It will depend on yourself now whether I become as jolly as an alderman or go on pining to a shadow. But every minute I spend here postpones the interview within doors, for which I am panting. I will go and seek your brother, and then——"

The sailor turned, and was off down the street and past Mrs Rugge's.

"Good heavens!" said Doris, "what a surprise! I can scarcely support myself; and you, why, you must be—— Oh, shall we go in to Mrs Andrews's until you are composed?"

"I am quite composed," said Una, softly. "Let us get home at once. We will go on quick, without speaking."

If Oakley had been dressed in plain clothes, his appearance, and the moment's conversation which he held with Una, would have attracted little attention. But while Veorse knew what it was about, there was small chance of an officer in uniform proceeding three paces on its pavement, far less of his addressing one of its inhabitants for a minute, without securing due notice.

"O my! isn't that lovely? Why, whoever is it? It must be a lord or a hemperer. Look, John Spiller!" exclaimed a damsel who was at the time taking in provender for Miss Burton's cat, and not doing it with undue haste.

"Somebody's a come to town, by Jarge!" answered Mr Spiller. "But I'll tell 'ee what he is, Betsy, my pretty lass; he's a horficer. I knows 'em. I used to live in Gosport afore I come here; and though I was a little chap then, the recollection comes back to me like. And that's what it is, you may depend, Betsy."

"Surely that's Miss Clowance he's speaking to," said Betsy. "Law, now he must be inquiring of the way to somewhere."

"Is that the way a stranger comes to you, Betsy, and asks for directions—seizing of your fistis and lookin' at 'ee as if you was raspberry jam? Which you be," added Mr Spiller gallantly. "Well, dang it, I must get on, and that's all about it. This makes sevenpence halfpenny sin' last Saturday, counting in the bit you had exter for what Oates's dog took o' Tuesday. You should pisin them dogs, Betsy. You be more tender to they than you be to others as better deserves your tenderness."

"I must go and tell missus what have happened," said Betsy, as she gave a gracious nod to the purveyor, and went in. In this way was Miss Burton (who was not in the habit of discussing her morsel of intelligence alone) promptly and fully informed of what had passed in the street. Mr Spiller also, at every house where there was a cat that was properly cared for, recounted what had happened, or a natural product thereof,—that is, he made statements which in the beginning were not unlike what had occurred, but as he travelled on were told with a difference, or with differences.

This was not all. Georgy Hoskin, the barber, was by the merest accident in the street at an unusual hour. The accident was that Mr Solder, the tinman and plumber, had been up rather late the night before with some members of his benefit society; that he had been indisposed in the morning and lain late; and that he had, in his discretion, not thought it well to shave himself, but had preferred to send for the barber. Thus it came about that Georgy Hoskin, with a shaving-pot in his hand, with a striped wrapper and a napkin under his arm, and a razor-case sticking out of the pocket of his jacket, was a witness, from a point of vantage not far off, to the scene which we have described between Oakley and Una. He loitered a minute or two on his way that he might see out the remarkable event, and then went on to his devoir.

Mr Solder was in the little room behind his shop, sitting without his coat and waistcoat, and resting his head on his hands, as one in affliction. He cast a look at the barber as he entered, and said—

"Oh, you've come at last, d—— you!"

"I've come, and not so very long, considering when I was a sent for," said Georgy Hoskin. "Hope there's nothin' particlar the matter, Mr Solder."

"I don't know whether it's particlar or whether it isn't, but it's half an hour since the boy run'd over to you, and I've been waiting ever since, onable to dress myself, 'cause I wasn't shaved. What do you say to that, you old hum-bug?"

"I say that, sending at this time of day, when the shop's a'most al'ays full, it's a singler piece of fortin that I could get clear so soon. Two customers, one with a beard as was more like quills than hairs, I cleaned off faster, I'll answer for it, than any man in Veorse could a done it, ay, or any man in the Furze Range, and then I come on direct. Now, I don't think there's much to complain of there."

"Well, I do then," answered Mr Solder, "and that there's

just the difference between us. And I don't want no more palaver; I want to be shaved, and I'd advise you to do it."

During this dialogue the barber had been making things ready. He had received from an attendant some hot water for his pot; he had, without any help from the worthy tradesman, got the wrapper round his neck and the napkin on his shoulder; he had coaxed up a delicious-looking lather in his soap-box, and was proceeding to lighten the darkness of Mr Solder's countenance with the same.

"Now, then," said Georgy, soothingly, "we'll soon have this crop a-reaped off. Though a manly beard, yours is nothing to speak of in the way of stiffness. Without your feelin' of me, I'll have it off as clean as a planed board."

"And mind what you're a-doing, my friend. I aint in the very softest of tempers, and if you turns up my skin, it's likely I may send my fist into your old ribs in a way you won't like."

"Threatenin' of a man is not the best way to make his 'and stiddy and akkerit," observed Georgy Hoskin sagely, as he gave his razor a loving stroke on the heel of his hand; "but I aint to be put out that way, bless you. I should be onworthy of my perfession, I should, if any trifle like that could make me oncertain. Now, then."

And Georgy seized Mr Solder's nose, and became master of the situation. Mr Solder perforce subsided into a listener, and was subject to the tongue as well as to the steel of the operator.

"People do see strange things in their lives, they that have got eyes," observed Georgy, as he reaped away and kept a fast grip of his victim. "'Tisn't every day that a officer in his lace and his shoulder-knots comes to Veorse; but I seed one outside anyhow, I did. If I hadn't knowed that Boney's hard put to it just now for bread and cheese, and I s'pose for frogs too, to say nothin' about ships, I should ha' thought the French was landed; but it couldn't ha' been a mounseer. No; and what's more, he must ha' been able to speak like a Christian, for I seed him a-talkin' to Miss Clowance, and they seemed quite friendly and nat'ral like, as if it had a been a brother com'd back from the wars."

Here Mr Solder freed his nose by a sudden and somewhat dangerous effort.

"Which Miss Clowance was it, Georgy?" asked he. "One of the elder ladies, or the young velvety one with the soft eyes?"

"Well," answered Georgy, "I never thought of her bein' velvety, though that's a good notion too, that is, and I shall take a opportunity of mentioning of it to some of my customers

as is nice in their langwigh. It was Miss Hewner, as is al'ays about with the niece what people thinks so charming."

"Look here, Georgy, you might drop one of my circulars at their door; nothin' like bein' in time."

"Time for what?" asked Georgy. "I'm generally pretty quick, I am, but I don't foller now, I confess."

"Why, don't you see, you old dog," said Mr Solder, whose imagination, clouded and weighted in the early hours, now sprung suddenly into activity, and went forward with leaps and bounds,—“don't you see that there'll probably be some furnishing to do, and I flatter myself there's nobody in the Furze Range that, for strength, style, and cheapness combined, can touch a person what shall be nameless, in any description of brass, tin, lead, or Britanniar metal wares, or in settin' of a pump or fram'in' of a cistern. Hip-baths on hire at moderate charges; jacks kep in order by annuil contracks; tall fire-guards for nusseries. Ha, ha, ha! Georgy, my boy!”

Georgy Hoskin was alarmed. With his great experience of society, he, of course, was aware that there was a kind of delirium to which persons of a convivial turn were subject. He thought the changing moods of Mr Solder indicated an affection of this kind, and he naturally shielded his right hand, with the razor in it, behind his back, lest the sight of it might inflame any suicidal or even murderous inclination in the patient.

"Easy, Mr Solder, easy, easy," said the barber in soothing tones. "You shouldn't let your sperrits get the whip hand of 'ea. You'll be very quiet now, won't 'ee, while I shaves the other side? Only that half the job's done, and it wouldn't look nohow conformable to carry a beard on one side and be clean polished on the other, I would advise leavin' of it alone till to-morrow. Now, I may depend upon your keepin' quite still?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, I'm d—d!" chuckled Mr Solder. "Why, Georgy, I didn't think you was such a cussed old jackass. Conformable, indeed! And you would advise leaving it alone, would you? Why, you don't think I've got the horrors? No, Georgy. The horrors is a serious thing. Tadpoles everywhere, upon the table and upon the bed-sheets; tremblins like the aguy, and horrible derlusions besides; leastways that's how I've heerd 'em described. But I've a got no horrors now; only you are so 'nation slow, you old tortiss, that you don't see the pint of what have struck me."

Mr Hoskin feared that he saw the point only too clearly; but, being a patient and a politic man, he spoke softly.

"I observe," said he, "that you've got a idea; but, if you'll

allow me to say so, Mr Solder, you have blurted it out rather sudden. Now, what I thinks is this: If you was to turn it in your mind a trifle, just to see that it's all square and rig'lar afore you publishes it, it would be a sensible thing to do; and while I'm a-shaving the other side of your face, will be an excellent opportunity for considering of it. Now, then, if you please."

But it did not please Mr Solder, who had become good-humoured, nay, merry.

"Look here, Georgy, you crafty old dog," said Mr Solder, "all that I can recollick you can recollick, and a precious deal more. Now, don't you mind how five or six year agone that soft, gentle Miss Clowance was a-goin' to be married to a sailor officer (I can't mind his name), and how he went to sea again, and never come back to her; and how people said he'd a behaved hisself very improper and onfeeling? You must mind that, George. Ay, I thought so. Well, now, when you was a-telling me of this meeting of her and a officer in the street, afore you'd well got the words out, I saw it all as plain as if they'd kep me in the secret. He's come back, I says to myself, that there roving tar's a come back, and he'll marry her now, and they'll set up housekeeping, and there'll be business to do shortly in many branches."

What with relief from apprehension and with admiration of Mr Solder's sagacity, Georgy Hoskin stood for a moment speechless. Then he inhaled a long breath, brought back the razor fearlessly into public view, and again fondly cherished its temper on the heel of his hand, as his wont was when he was at peace with himself in the intervals of shaving operations.

"That I shouldn't ha' thought of it!" said he, half in soliloquy, half in compliment to his hearer, at whom he looked out of the corners of his eyes. "In course I mind the young leutenant being here. I was out every night, Sundays excepted, after the shop was shut up, doing the exter-waiting bisness at the various parties as was giv'd. I mind, too, how sudden he left; and I mind, yes, I do mind, that the folks said he'd been a little thoughtless like, as we all are at times in our youth, Mr Solder."

"As we all are," responded Mr Solder cheerily, and as if he felt the glow of an approving conscience. "All, that is, as are men of mettle, Georgy. I might say that I myself, in my youthful days—— But howsomever, that's neither here nor there; such things is buried in the past. What I've got to say now is, that I'll lay a heavy wager that the spark's come back for matrimony, and that there'll be good orders afore long."

"Young housekeeping don't bring much grist to my mill," answered Georgy; "'tis rather a deadened arm, or the gout, or maybe a little accidental merry-making as helps me. Yet that reminds me that there will be a little feasting if there should be a wedding, which may render gents nervous of a morning, so as not to fancy handling of a razor themselves. Also, the exter-waiting bisness may be brisk once more. Yes, some good may come out of it."

"Very well, then, Georgy, the thought of it has made me feel quite like a man again. Take off the rest of my beard, and then I'll see if a small drop of something cordial won't complete my renorvation, as the good people call it. You and me, Georgy, after I've washed my face, 'll have something refreshing out o' that there cupboard; dang'd if we don't, my boy! I think I do see as far into a millstone as another. Well, now then, George."

And the whole programme which Mr Solder had succinctly sketched in the above speech was, it is believed, carried out in its entirety within the next half-hour. It is pleasant to add that the two who had so rudely met in the morning parted the best of friends.

Mr Solder that evening mentioned the event of the afternoon, and his comments thereon, in the strictest confidence to about twenty of his select acquaintances; and Georgy Hoskin, to every man whose nose came into his gripe, made a similar communication. The result was, that all Veorse was in a high state of excitement, could not wait while events unfolded themselves, but discounted them largely, and gave currency to innumerable fables.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ABSOLUTION.

"Ask sister to come to my room," said Una, as soon as they were within doors, "and mind you keep perfectly calm, so that there may be no suspicion that anything has happened."

"I can't be perfectly calm," answered Doris. "Oh, I'm so frightened; I don't know what I'm doing!"

"Then keep out of everybody's way, Doris, and I'll send a servant to fetch sister. Oh, Doris, kiss me!"

made pretence of talking on as if his interest were centred in the subject of conversation, but his eyes wandered continually towards the door. He was decidedly not an attentive listener to the remarks of the others, and his own remarks were neither pertinent nor diffuse. He was not, however, kept long in expectation. After a moderate interval the door opened, and Una, bright and blooming, came in with a quiet but firm step.

Oakley went to her and again took both her hands. After gazing at her for a few moments, he said—

"Once again, after years of wandering and toil, I have the happiness of taking your hand in your own house, and in presence of your relatives. The glimpse which I caught of you in the street to-day was but an imperfect, as it was a somewhat unlawful, delight. But now that I may again be in your presence with the approval of your family, I cannot say how great my joy is."

"I am afraid," answered Una, "that you have had a fatiguing journey, and that the excitement of meeting so many old acquaintances may be more than you are quite equal to."

"Yes," put in Eleanor, "Una is right; you must be careful not to over-fatigue yourself, Captain Oakley. Now, sit down; take this easy-chair, and we will sit near you, and talk, or listen, or sit quiet, as you may prefer."

Oakley placed a chair for Una close to the easy-chair into which Eleanor had voted him, and took his seat with blissful feelings. It must be remembered that there had never been an engagement between him and Una, though there had been a great deal of what is vaguely termed "love-making." So, for the present, they could occupy no more advanced position in the realm of the affections than that which had been so suddenly interrupted between six and seven years ago. There was likely to be a great and a rapid advance before long, as all who were in their secrets knew, but the lovers had to take up the thread where they had dropped it, and to work on by the established ways towards closer relationship.

Thus had all preliminary difficulties which lay in the way of the renewal of the courtship been overcome by a *coup de main*. If the barriers had been kept up for a season, they could only have been so for form's sake, because Una, the prize for whom the conflict would have been waged, was on the side of the besieger. But what really smoothed away obstacles was (although nobody said so) the consciousness in each breast of the family that the lover was decidedly in earnest this time— anxious to receive his bride without delay, and anxious, too, to make every reparation possible for his former *lâcheté*.

While the happiest imaginable evening was being spent by the party around Miss Clowance's fire, great disturbance prevailed in the outside world of Veorse. Society there had been violently agitated, and was experiencing the hot and cold blasts of sudden intelligence, in extremes very trying to its constitution. It had, as we know, just obtained, through the laudable exertions of Mr Millis, presumptive evidence of the treason of Major l'Estrange. It was assimilating that important intelligence, and was just beginning to justify its easy acceptance of the accusation by nods of the head, and by the remark passing from one of its members to another, "It seems to be the fate of that family; you remember unfortunate Miss Una, and her sailor beau. So frank and hearty as he seemed, too. Oh dear, poor little thing!" when suddenly, like frost upon the opening spring, spread from east to west the perplexing announcement that Captain Oakley had returned actually and in the flesh to Veorse and to his allegiance. The feline purveyor and the man of lather had told it out with wonderful rapidity through the town; and the answer to every tentative inquiry made by wary townfolk, who were too old to be taken by a simple rumour, was only too confirmatory of the fact. Post-boys testified to having brought thither at a killing pace—the post-boy rendering of "on the wings of love"—a naval officer in his uniform. The officer had been seen speaking in the street to Miss Una Clowance, and holding that young lady's hands. He had been seen coming from the house of Percival Clowance in company with that reverend gentleman, and he had been seen to enter the residence of the Misses Clowance. His luggage bore the name of Captain Oakley, and he had given the same name at the hotel. Did anybody want more than this? Well, if anybody did, old Jack Starr, the farrier, and formerly the ostler, who smelt of myrrh, aloes, and cassia, as if he carried a psalter in his pocket, declared that he minded the young "leef-tenant" as well as if he had "seed 'im yesterday," and further, that he would be (it may have been "skinned"—the record is not clear) if this were not the same young chap, "onny he wasn't so very young now, neither."

The reaction which followed was very trying and conducive to scepticism. Many persons who were thus rudely deprived of their belief in the sailor's perfidy, which could no longer be sustained, voluntarily flung from them their faith in the soldier's misbehaviour, against which not an argument had been offered, saying that "such absurd stories were put about and contradicted; that, for their part, they did not mean to believe anything until they saw it with their eyes." Gossips only of ex-

perience, and devoted to their science, saw the folly of surrendering a still tenable imputation upon one man's character because another man had cut short, at the tender age of seven years, a blemish which had been affixed to his name. But human nature is very inconsistent, and often acts rashly and intemperately. It is a fact that Mr Millis's discovery lost both freshness and flavour after Oakley's return. If the Veorse people had been of a calculating turn, instead of being impulsive and wayward, would they not have clung with doubled affection to the scandal which was yet left to them?

The thing, pleasant or not, had to be accepted. Pretty Una was no longer a thing to thank God on, but was about to receive her own with usury. She lost once a dashing lieutenant not long out of his teens; her loss had been cast literally upon the waters, and after many days he had come back to her in the glory of manhood, with rank in his profession, and with his full quota of that renown which used to encircle the British navy as the rays border a planet. Will it ever be so again? Yes, perhaps. But the nation must suffer adversity first. It was satiated with glory seventy or eighty years ago; its perception and appetite have been depraved ever since, and, in the wantonness of abnormal yearnings, it craves for poltroonery and cant. That, however, is not the present subject.

Whatever may have been said at private conferences or judicial conclaves which sat on other people's affairs, it is certain that Veorse, collectively and individually, rushed to welcome back Oakley, as if his return had been their one consuming desire since the day when he left them. The Mayor and Council presented him with an address; everybody, great and small, that rejoiced in the use of a visiting card, came to offer compliments; the Growcester papers (two) published laudatory and congratulatory articles, the poet of one of them out-doing himself in a copy of original verses, which, by a curious coincidence, breathed much of the spirit and sentiment of "Ye Mariners of England;" people assembled in crowds to see him when he rode or drove; his patronage was solicited for every public entertainment; in short, there were demonstrations of respect and affection which it would be impossible even to enumerate. He had to remind them that he was an invalid, just freed from the hospital, to save himself from being taken possession of, and from having all private rights in his person and time rigidly ignored.

And then the Clowances, in what a position did they find themselves! The limited foresight of this simple family had failed altogether to grasp the circumstances of the event which

had occurred to them. They had been consulting for Una's feelings, for doing her right in the eyes of all, a little too for the family honour; they had thought well about the prudence of such a match, and about the prospects of happiness which it offered. But it never occurred to them that the reconciliation with Oakley, if it should come about, would suddenly draw them to the front of the *beau monde* of Veorse and its neighbourhood; yet so it was. They acceded to great worship. As for that one of them who was most affected by the turn of the wheel—as for pretty, modest, unpretending Una—it is delightful to think how she was exalted to be

“The cynosure of neighbouring eyes.”

And how quietly and moderately she bore her exaltation! Whatever riot of joy may have been within her gentle bosom, she was outwardly staid, composed, and thoughtful for others as ever she had been. Of all the ways in which Una had contemplated the great event of Oakley's return,—and she had looked at it in many ways,—it had not occurred to her to regard it as “a feather in her cap.” It was a feather for all that. The principal subject of conversation now was she that had been called Forsaken.

“To her each lady's look was lent,
On her each gallant's eye was bent.”

And people, according to their dispositions and opinions, marvelled at her patience and faith, and at the unfading smoothness of her cheek and brightness of her eyes. Many a voiceless blessing was given to the brave, constant damsel, and many a hearty voice pronounced that she deserved every tittle of her good fortune. Withal, it is not denied that there were some noses which in private turned up into the air, and demanded of the powers which keep watch over flirtations, and engagements, and similar dispensations, what there was in that insipid, slow piece of propriety, that such a plum should fall into her mouth, as it were. And there were others who knew that they were not envious nor spiteful, and who, goodness knew, had no wish for a tardily repentant lover to take pity on *them*; who nevertheless felt that it would have been some satisfaction if Una had wasted a little, or contracted red eyes from much weeping, or carried the score on her brow of all the seasons that she had waited; who thought that would have been only reasonable; and who were persuaded that the artful little thing had guessed how it was going to be, and unnaturally kept herself fresh. Such devices were to be hated and despised!

But, in truth, these remarks have overrun the sequence of events. They indicate what happened after Oakley had been some days in Veorse. But there were things worth mentioning which preceded the action of the general public. There was the presentation of the Captain to Miss Doris Adair, a young lady of whose very existence he had been ignorant, or at least forgetful. There was the meeting between him and his sister, Mrs Stanshon, who was as joyful on Una's account as on her own. There was the rapid recovery which he achieved of the entire goodwill of everybody in the Clowance household—Eleanor delighted and gay as a girl, even Dorothy owning herself charmed. And then there were,—how is one to intrude upon these tender scenes?—there were very private conversations between Oakley and Una, in which, though more may have been meant than met the ear, yet a very great deal did meet the ear—the young lady's ear, that is. For Oakley, in regard to Una, did not proceed in the offhand way which he had followed in becoming reconciled to her relatives. There he had availed himself of the frank, unsophisticated style which is generally allowed in members of his profession; but he did not in any way shelter himself here. And yet it was here, more than anywhere, that excuses had been made for him more satisfactorily than he could make them for himself. Where no defence was asked, there it was that he laboured hard to defend himself. He would ask nothing from Una until he had at least assured himself that she thought of him no worse than he deserved.

So Una had to listen to his pleadings, which, on the whole, she did not find tiresome; and when he had said all that he could think of in extenuation, and when he had been assured at last, the same as at first, that she charged him with nothing, then, by way of changing the subject, the young man spoke of the future. On this he was as eloquent as he had been on the past; he told Una that he could not live without her, and that his career would be blighted, and happiness for him impossible, unless she consented to be his wife. And when he had said out his say, and paused for her reply, Una gave him her hand, and told him that she would marry no one without the full consent of her brother and sisters; but, consent or no consent, she would never marry any but himself.

"Then," said Oakley, pressing the little hand to his lips, "I think it is plain sailing now, and we will have everybody's goodwill before night."

Thereupon he got together, as soon as it could be arranged, the same awful council of three, which has been named as issuing its edicts concerning Doris's love affair; and he put things

before them in a manner which not only came up to their highest expectations, but considerably exceeded anything they had imagined. Oakley had a small property of his own to begin with, and had never been entirely dependent on his profession. That he had still, and three times the value of it in money; for service under Captain Trigor had been very active service indeed; prizes had been taken every month or two; there was no way of spending money at sea, and so it was all forthcoming to endow his bride with; and he offered to make provision in any form that might be deemed advisable. Add to this that he was a Post-Captain, with an excellent reputation, and that he hoped soon to be well enough to continue his career in the navy; and the council could find no word to say against the match, which became thenceforth a confirmed project. And Oakley took Una in his arms, and told her so.

When all was settled, and not till then, the accepted lover wrote to his sister, announcing what had taken place, declaring that he had done everything in his power to make reparation for his offence, and offering to go to see her at the earliest moment, when she would receive him. This proved to be a very early moment indeed, and so the brother and sister were reconciled. Rich and rare gifts, collected from all parts of the world, were produced out of the sailor's trunks, and presented to Una, her sisters, and Doris, in such profusion that they entreated the open-hearted tar to stay his offerings, if only for a season.

Veorse, as we know, was beforehand with the family as to these events, and quite prepared for the announcement which was now made public. And then began the demonstrations of which some mention has been made. Mr Millis, always anxious to be foremost with intelligence, and to instruct everybody else, had obtained and read up the accounts of the Aiguille's action with the Estelle, and of the capture of the latter; and he was very willing to make his neighbours acquainted with these, which now had become of peculiar interest. Nobody in those days asked a question as to which side was victorious in any naval action that might have been fought. That was an understood thing. But the victory in this case was won by something more than hard fighting, although there was plenty of that. By the consummate seamanship of her commander, the smaller vessel had, after a little manœuvring, obtained the weather-gauge; she had sailed across the enemy's bows, and raked her from stem to stern with every gun in her broadside, while receiving hardly a shot in return. Then, after a long fight, in which the hull of the Estelle suffered cruelly, and a number of her crew were wounded, the English vessel had run cleverly

alongside, grappled the enemy, and finally boarded her, the boarding party being led by the captain. This attack by boarding was expected, and the Frenchman, as far as his reduced means permitted, was looking out for it. Accordingly, the boarders were very soon perceived, and an alarm given which brought a defensive force to the point of collision. But before a reinforcement had crossed the deck, and while Oakley was yet on the gunwale, on the point of descending, a ready fellow snatched up a handspike, and pushing with this violently against his chest, upset his balance, and sent him overboard. This did not, however, interrupt the boarding operation, which went on with great vigour; and such an accident as a fall overboard having being provided for, the captain was soon on his own deck, from which, with a second force of boarders, he sprung once more on to the deck of the enemy. In the hand-to-hand encounter, the French made a better defence than they had done at longer range; they were prepared to dispute every plank in the ship; driven from one position, they fell back to another, fighting gallantly, and leaving the deck behind them slippery with blood. But their bravery was all in vain. The assailants forced their way with a fury that would not be denied. Many of them fell, but one from behind stepped into every gap. When they reached the waist of the ship, it was plain that, if they could keep pressing the enemy as they had begun, the capture of the vessel was only a question of minutes. An awful struggle took place near the capstan. A smart lad, whose frock was soaked with blood, either his own or from the foe, in dashing forward, slipped and fell on the deck. A Frenchman, with a pike, stood over him in a moment, in the act of thrusting the pike into his neck. Oakley, who saw the incident, made a spring to his left, and caught the pike, dealing a heavy blow with his cutlass on the right arm of him who held it; but in doing this he exposed his right side, and another pike from that quarter was thrust into it, inflicting a severe wound. He was disengaged from this, and still kept his place in the *mêlée*; but the blood flowed fast from his side, and little by little a faintness, which he could not keep off, overcame his senses. He sunk down motionless, amid the loud huzzas of his own crew, and as the clash of steel ceased. The Estelle had struck.

The story of the engagement, as here told, is taken from family records, and is likely to be accurate in all essential particulars; but, creditable as it is, it is tame in comparison of that which Mr Millis collected. The feats of arms, as described by the little lawyer, equalled anything that is to be read in the

most daring romances, and included much that was absolutely impossible, and much of which the parts were incompatible the one with the other. But it all went down as if it had been the most consistent and moderate narrative in the world; and hearers were so far from wishing to tone it down in any way, that many of them, on the first occasion of repeating it, slightly intensified incidents which, as they felt sure, Mr Millis had not depicted with sufficient spirit.

CHAPTER XXV.

LES ABSENTS ONT TOUJOURS TORT.

As soon as Captain Oakley and his little girl, as he called her, had talked their fill about themselves exclusively, they began to speak, at odd moments, of those in whom they both felt an interest. And it was not long, one may be sure, before Una's pretty niece was their subject, nor before Una let it be known that Doris's heart, like her own, had been cruelly troubled by the wars, and that, unlike her, Doris was still kept in miserable suspense. From this it was but a step or two to the mention of L'Estrange's name, on which there came an exclamation from Oakley.

"You don't say so! How strange! But, yes, I remember now. He said he had been here, and that he knew you. Yes, of course. Well, it *is* a coincidence. But such things will happen. A man who has been some time adrift in the world ought not to be astonished at anything that turns up."

"These dark observations mean, I presume," said Una, "that you have met Major l'Estrange, or that you have some knowledge of him."

"Pardon me, little one," answered he, not strictly confining himself to words. "I forgot that you do not yet know every part of my history. Why, I gave L'Estrange a passage to Spain last year, and a devilish superior, pleasant fellow I found him to be."

"Oh, how very curious! and how very delightful! For you will be able to tell us how he fared after he left us. Doris will be so overjoyed."

"I have since seen L'Estrange on shore. I was in their camp before San Sebastian in August, after he was a captain."

"That is charming. And was he quite strong again, and doing well?"

"As strong and hearty as possible. You know that he has greatly distinguished himself since then. I knew he would if ever he got the chance."

"Oh yes. We know of his promotion."

It will be in the reader's recollection that Una and Doris had been kept in ignorance of the rumour which had been going about to L'Estrange's prejudice. Oakley also had not happened to hear of it, and so the two discussed the Major very favourably. But, of course, Una took an early opportunity of mentioning to her sisters and niece the wonderful fact that Oakley knew Major l'Estrange. To Doris this was indeed interesting intelligence, and, although she shrank from questioning Oakley on the subject next her heart, she managed, through Una, to extract from him much of the information which she desired to get. But Dorothy was all alarm lest Oakley should divulge the bit of scandal which had so troubled her, and she therefore took an early opportunity of cautioning him in regard thereto. Oakley was "Felix" now in the household, and in the very highest favour with the elder ladies, to whom he was as kind and attentive as if he had been their brother.

"Felix," said Miss Clowance, when they were alone together, "Una has told me of your being acquainted with Major l'Estrange."

"Yes, I am happy to say I have met him, and a really good fellow he is."

"It was really singular that, standing as you both did in relation to this family, chance should have thrown you together."

"So it may appear to those who lead quiet lives in the country; but a little cruising about the world, and meeting with strange adventures every day, make one less disposed to wonder at a meeting of that kind."

"I daresay that is so. We all thought very well of Major l'Estrange when he was here. Everybody in Veorse, I think, liked him. You understand, I believe, the terms on which he parted with us, and with Doris Adair."

Oakley made a motion of assent.

"Well, as I was saying, he appeared to us a nice, intelligent young man."

"I thought him considerably above the average of young men. Liked him very much. Have no doubt of his succeeding, if he lives."

"You know nothing of him but what is to his credit?"

"Certainly not."

"Your sister has told you nothing concerning him?"

"My sister and I have had so much to say about ourselves and those immediately connected with us, that we have scarcely mentioned his name."

"Then I must tell you that there has been a most disturbing rumour in circulation, of which neither Una nor Doris knows. We have heard that he has fought a duel with, and wounded, a foreign officer—Spanish or Portuguese, I don't remember which; and about a lady, his relations with whom are, to say the least, mysterious."

"Bless me! You don't say so!"

"I am afraid that Colonel Stanshon considers his conduct reprehensible. Did he say anything to his disparagement when you saw him in Spain?"

"Not he. He praised him. He evidently liked the youngster as much as I did."

"I am glad you know of nothing to support the evil rumour."

"Softly, my dear lady," answered he, as the recollection of Madame Valdez crossed his mind. "I did not say exactly that. I do know something of L'Estrange being connected in some way with a foreign lady, or rather with an English lady bearing a foreign name, which may have something to do with this story. He told me it was a perfectly harmless affair."

"Does what you know in any way give colour to the rumour?"

"Directly, no. There is nothing wrong in the matter, as far as I am cognisant of it. And I have too high an opinion of L'Estrange to suspect him without good reason. I think I had better speak to my sister before I say more on the subject. I will do so as soon as possible."

Oakley was troubled about this matter. There had, he remembered, been something mysterious in L'Estrange's asking the passage for Madame Valdez; and she on her voyage home had been reticent concerning the claim which she had made on the young man's assistance. But at the time he cared nothing about the mystery. It was L'Estrange's affair. He was obliging L'Estrange in a matter which might or might not be a delicate one; that was all. He might be glad of a friend's assistance in some such case himself some day. He felt how close he had been with L'Estrange as to his own heart affair. Why might not his friend be reticent also?

But he knew nothing of Doris Adair then, nor of how L'Estrange, by entertaining affection for a foreign lady, would be wronging a person who would soon become his (Oakley's) re-

lation, and dear to him. Yet he still thought well of L'Estrange, and would not think evil of him until he should see clear cause for doing so. As the case was one the investigation of which it would not be well to delay, he inquired forthwith of Mrs Stanshon what it was that her husband had said about this quarrel and the cause of it. The information he received showed plainly that Madame Valdez was the person indicated. It might, after all, have been an innocent affair enough, so far as it had come under his observation; but this duel with a foreign officer gave it a different complexion. Stanshon, he was sure, would not have blamed L'Estrange unless he believed him to have been in the wrong, and the impression left upon his mind was unfavourable to L'Estrange.

He imparted his thoughts to Miss Clowance, but said that he had come very unwillingly to a conclusion adverse to the young soldier, and that certainly the case against him was not so well supported but that he should be heard in his own defence before he could be condemned. "It will be a question," said he, "whether I might write to L'Estrange as soon as I have become Doris's uncle by marriage; but even that step is one to be taken cautiously, because it seems that he was resentful and intractable when Stanshon attempted to obtain his confidence as to this matter." It was felt also that none of the Clowance family could ask him for an explanation without appearing to use this bit of scandal as a pretence for reminding him of the past and for sounding him as to his intentions. So the perplexity became greater than ever. If Doris were not informed by one of her own friends, she might shortly be enlightened disagreeably from some other quarter.

And this last consideration prevailed. Miss Clowance thought it only right and just to her niece that she should be truly and gently informed of what was being said; and Captain Oakley wrote to Colonel Stanshon begging for every bit of sound information that could be given, and also communicating that part of the story which Stanshon did not appear to know, namely, the share which he, Oakley, had had in the mysterious little plot.

Doris was not quite of Una's placid disposition. She was violently affected when Miss Clowance, with the utmost tenderness and caution, broke to her the suspicion of her lover with which they all had been troubled. She shut herself up; would take scarce any food; discouraged, if she did not positively object to, attempts to comfort her, and even the visits of her aunts to her chamber; and seemed to surrender herself to grief. Such a hold did her affliction take of her that she

became very ill, and caused the greatest alarm to the whole house. Doris had never before known what it was to have her affection and her pride wounded; both were vulnerable points with her, and she suffered accordingly. After a time, however, she could not refuse (as at first she did) to listen to the comforters, who said that this was not necessarily a case of disloyalty proved against her lover; and that he might represent the affair in such a light that he would stand excused, or even meritorious. She was afflicting herself (or "taking on," as some of them put it) as if the very worst construction of his conduct were proved to be the true one. Now, this was being rather in a hurry. It would be time enough to mourn hopelessly when hope should be at an end.

Thoughts like these, and the strength and elasticity of youth—which last probably had a good deal to do with her condition, though she would have been very angry at the suggestion of such a thing—these combined brought her in a week or two out of the acute stage of her disorder. She took her place again among the family, but was very dejected and nervous. She spoke very little of her trouble, but seemed to have it never out of her mind.

Mrs Stanshon, anxious that everybody about her brother and Una should be cheerful, came to comfort, and spoke soothingly to Doris.

"You know, my dear," said she, "that Colonel Stanshon does not pretend to know the particulars of this unhappy business; he has never heard the other side of the question."

"I know that," answered Doris; "but I cannot think what good interpretation of it there can be. I have thought it over enough with the view of finding some comfortable aspect of it, I can tell you."

"But you know too little of the accidents which come in men's ways—even I, who am a soldier's wife, know too little of the chances of a camp—to be able to decide that I have looked at the story in all its phases. There may be some most easy solution, which neither of us has ever thought of, yet which, when explained to us, will appear simple and natural."

"I admit it, dear Mrs Stanshon," Doris answered. "But the probability of that kind of solution presenting itself is not great, and the fewer false hopes one buoys one's self up with the better."

"That feeling, taken by itself, may be right. I will not say it isn't. But the opposite feeling, to which I fear that you incline, is also reprehensible and unwise. We may nurse an unwarrantable despair as well as a false hope."

Doris did not answer, and Mrs Stanshon went on.

"Now, you know, I was going to say that even if our young friend should prove to have been not quite—not entirely, you know—blameless (he may have been imprudent or thoughtless, without any serious breach of faith), even if such should be the case, which I have no right to say, he would be sure on the first reflection to return to his allegiance and——"

Mrs Stanshon ceased suddenly at sight of the expression visible on Doris's face. The eyes were ablaze, the nostrils distended, and the lips compressed. There were other signs too of great agitation.

"I would never pardon," said Doris, after a short pause, during which she had endeavoured to calm herself, "the least falling away from good faith. I told him so. He knows it. It was the one impediment to his returning and claiming me. Nothing else should stand between us."

Doris wept bitterly, and Mrs Stanshon, finding that she certainly had not helped matters much in the present, whatever her words might do on consideration, was fain to take her leave. But Una was a better comforter.

"Everything will be sure to come right," said she, "if you but have patience."

"I cannot tell; I am not so sure," Doris would say. "I shall not consider them to have come right if I find that he has been in the least to blame."

"You ought not to imagine," would be Una's answer, "that a person of whom you had thought well could do anything that you could blame him for. I would not."

And this advice was palatable. Doris thought she would decree that anything wrong on L'Estrange's part must be impossible. And this resolution appeared for the moment to clear away all difficulties.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A LOOK INTO TRASEADEN HALL.

When everybody in Veorse and in its neighbourhood was offering some tribute of welcome or respect to Captain Oakley, it would have been strange if a person in the public position of a member of Parliament had failed to give the officer a word

of greeting. And there was a member of Parliament not far from the town, although he did not represent any place in the Furze Range, but was one of the two members for a borough in a very remote region, unknown save by name to any not curious in geography, the voters whereof were thirteen in number, and the street whereof (for it had but one street) boasted of houses on only one side, the sea-shore coming up to where the opposite houses might have stood after leaving a convenient breadth of roadway. This member of the Legislature was Chatham Salusbury, Esq., who represented Caerlywmpthoedd in Wales, and who was at present resident in his grandfather's mansion, Traseaden Hall.

Mr Salusbury had some recollection of the time when Oakley had been in the neighbourhood as a lieutenant, at which time neither his rank nor his services seemed to call for any marked recognition from a member of the Legislature; but it was different now, and Mr Salusbury, who had some ambition of his own, would have been sorry not to make himself a little popular by doing honour to the popular hero. Accordingly, Mr Salusbury visited Oakley at the inn where he still lodged, and possessed himself infinitely charmed to make his acquaintance. He was a handsome man, with a pleasant manner; and though he was rather more artificial than the sailor approved, yet he made on the whole a not unfavourable impression. The state of Oakley's health forbade his acceptance for the present of an invitation to stay a few days at the Hall, but it was kindly given, and he felt obliged by it.

The introduction of Mr Chatham Salusbury into these scenes makes it necessary that a brief notice should be taken of how things had fared with his family since mention was last made of it, which was on occasion of the Clowance ladies indignantly rejecting overtures of "visiting terms" from Traseaden. Sir Chesterfield Salusbury, now an old man, was still healthy and active for his years. He had gradually withdrawn himself from field sports and taken to home life. A tolerably wide correspondence, which he still kept up, amused him, and so did reading the newspapers; his exercise was taken chiefly on the back of a quiet pony; he could walk pretty well yet, but he did not like the exercise; and he spent his evenings in playing at whist, or at backgammon, when a rubber could not be arranged. And, strange to say, his game at backgammon was usually with the wife whom, in former years, he had so devoutly wished in her grave.

Had a change, then, taken place in Sir Chesterfield's disposition? Was his heart softened? Some people thought so.

But there was another way of accounting for the change that had come upon him. He had long since given up the idea of marrying again, and marrying a fortune. The comfort of his home had become, and was becoming, of greater and still greater importance to him; and her ladyship contrived to make the Hall very comfortable, she being now far less of a complaining invalid than she had been in younger days. So acquaintances who troubled themselves about his domestic affairs were divided in opinion as to the cause of the baronet's changed relations with his wife, some saying that he was quite a reformed character, that his heart had been always good, and it was certain that he would become affectionate whenever he should have withdrawn from the bustle and distractions of the world; while others held that everything could be accounted for by the recollection of his d—d selfishness; he had hated and ill-used his wife while she stood in the way of his plans, and now that she had become necessary to his comfort, he treated her civilly. Who was to decide?

Sir Chesterfield's taste for managing men, and for doing a stroke of business in the polite or political world, was as decided as ever. For a special object he would come out as an old beau, and make his bows, and pay his compliments, and rub up his small talk, and try to fathom those who could be of use, as earnestly as ever he did. But it must be for a special object now; it was not worth doing merely to test his proficiency at the game; it was no longer amusing. His past life he seemed to regard with much complacency. He evidently thought that, as men went, he was by no means a bad sample. And when his grandsons were at home he would often be gay and conversational, regaling them with anecdotes of his prime, or instructing them by the history of intrigues which, ugly and venomous in themselves, had yielded precious jewels to him, because he understood how to turn them to account.

Then Sir Chesterfield would discourse of celebrated persons who had disappeared, or were about to disappear, from the scene of their former exploits, but who were leaving behind them valuable legacies. Mr Sheridan was on his last legs, and very rarely to be seen by the rising generation; but the baronet could describe what manner of man he was, and recall a hundred reminiscences of him. He had enjoyed at one time an acquaintance which approached to intimacy with the author of 'She Stoops to Conquer;' but this acquaintance had languished in consequence of the illustrious Oliver having evinced a disposition to borrow money. When he told of this, the old man of the world would caution his descendants as to "that sort of

people," and tell them that if they allowed themselves to be entertained by the talents of such, they must be careful of admitting them to familiarity. And on very confidential occasions he would reveal that he had now and then been in company with the great lexicographer, whom, however, he did not admire, nay, whom he did not scruple sometimes to call "a d—d vulgar fellow, you know; quite a brute." But there was a tradition among Sir Chesterfield's set that the Doctor had on a certain occasion given him one between the eyes.

There were racy stories of the Prince of Wales before he was Regent, and of his royal brothers; notices of a very fine gentleman, a Mr Walpole, afterwards Earl of Orford, who was said to write very charming letters; souvenirs of Dr Benjamin Franklin, the famous rebel (as Sir Chesterfield called him); glowing descriptions of the Duchess of Gordon; accounts of Hastings' trial, and one knows not what revivals of days gone by. It was said that an attentive listener could readily distinguish between drafts on the baronet's own memory, and stories which he gave at second-hand. But that may have been all ill-nature. At any rate, however he came by it, he had plenty to say concerning men who had made their mark.

It may be admitted that Sir Chesterfield, though still shrewd, had not that keen sense of, nor that scrupulous regard for, what his company would appreciate, which he was known to have had in earlier days. He added but sparingly to his stock of anecdotes, and he told the old ones so often that he could by no care remember whether a hearer had submitted to it once or a hundred times before. Talking had become to him an end as well as a means; he liked the sound of his own voice, and the point of an old story better, perhaps, than his listeners might. On the whole, he had sufficient freshness left, and enough study of society to be considered by most of his acquaintances a fine old fellow, if sometimes tiresome.

Lady Salusbury, though she had to some extent recovered health, made no approach to being lively or agreeable. She cared little for general society, and her greatest delight was in a quiet cup of tea with some other elderly lady, over which were discussed matters of kinds which it is better to refrain from particularising, as many readers might be inclined to deny the possibility of human beings being interested in the like. Her domestic duties were rigidly performed, and she had discovered, and she ministered to, the tastes of Sir Chesterfield's age. Her sight, however, had been failing much of late, and she found the pursuit of her usual avocations become more and more difficult.

Chatham, the elder grandson and the heir, was now, though

still a young man, a legislator of respectable experience. His grandfather had hoped to see him a placeman of some sort ere this; but somehow the times were already hardening against ingenuous aspirants of his class. The glorious days of reverendary posts, rich sinecures, and unaudited accounts were passing, and would pass full soon. Chatham's vote went in exchange for his seat, and was at the disposal of the patron of the borough, so there was nothing further to be made out of that. By reason chiefly of the war the times had been very critical, and Ministers had found it absolutely necessary to fill such places in the Government as were not required by the aristocracy by men of talent, with some capacity for working. Soldiers, sailors, and diplomatic men were picking up the crumbs which heretofore had gone to solace faithful supporters of the party in power. Thus a few hundreds a-year, derived from obscure appointments, which have since his time been abolished, were all that Mr Salusbury was able to earn through his parliamentary connection. Sir Chesterfield, however, who by no means sat down as a eulogist of "the good old times," but adapted himself as well as his years would permit to the changing age, was for ever telling him, that although good things were not to be got exactly as of old, yet they were to be got by a little study of the altered circumstances, and he only wished he were twenty years younger, that he might show his posterity how to work the opportunities.

It may be inferred from what has been said above that Mr Salusbury was not a speaker, and did not interest himself much in politics. He had, however, the family taste for fashionable life and for expensive pleasures, and he had been fortunate at play. His grandfather, no longer requiring all his income for his own gratification, was not illiberal in supplying the heir, to whom, however, he often feelingly addressed a word of caution, to the effect that, as long as the family all together did not dispose of more than the fair revenues of the estate, no great harm could be done; but if once that boundary were passed, Chatham himself would be the chief sufferer thereby. Mr Salusbury was a devoted admirer of the fair sex, but hitherto had not experienced a passion sufficiently serious to make him think of matrimony. And Sir Chesterfield had not thus far urged him to contract an alliance for the objects which, as he thought, ought to be the primary ones in marriage, namely, money and influence; because that shrewd old tactician held that a man was not likely to marry to the best advantage before the age of three-and-thirty.

Wolsey Salusbury, the second grandson, had been intended

by Sir Chesterfield to enjoy the family living—a snug living it was too. It had been aforetime the benefice of the venerable person whose portrait surmounted the fireplace in the library. Of course Sir Chesterfield never for one moment considered whether Wolsey's tastes and disposition, his principles or his attainments, were such as would besit a pastor. He only thought of keeping from eight to nine hundred a-year in the family; and one man in a black gown would be for that purpose as good as another. But it never occurred to the baronet that the black gown itself might not be attainable; and, sooth to say, he was justified in regarding it as a thing easy of acquirement, for could there not be seen daily dunces, *vauriens*, blacklegs, evil livers, parasites, indued in black gowns that they might make prey of preferment? Yet it was in this article of the black gown that the plan broke down. Young Wolsey, as if it were not enough that he should come up to the standard of his family in sharpness, was, unfortunately, over-sharp. He was "sent down" from his university in circumstances which precluded his ever going up again; and there was a mark against his name, so black that it would be unwise in him to try his luck at any other university. An ordination, dispensing with a university degree, had nearly been secured from a jolly bishop who was not addicted to asking questions; but this holy man, who knew a thing or two, detected Wolsey in some queer dealing with regard to a horse-race on which his lordship had staked a heavy sum. After that the bishop's conscience would not suffer him to lay careless hands on the head of such a reprobate.

"Damn him!" said Sir Chesterfield; "he not only would have been provided for in the rectory, the next presentation to which will now have to be sold; but I am sure that I could have procured him an appointment as a nobleman's chaplain, which might have led to a prebend, or, by —, a deanery. And a fellow with such a character, what shall I do with him? I don't mean to say that men in as good positions as he haven't done things just as bad, because I know they have; but they haven't been such cursed fools as to be exposed before all the world." It was, however, only Sir Chesterfield's fashion of speaking which affirmed that Wolsey had been exposed before all the world. Before the academical and clerical world he had undergone certainly considerable defacement of character, and there was no recovery for him as far as the living was concerned. But though the living were lost, all was not lost. It seemed an obvious resource for a person in Wolsey's strait to enter the army or the navy, if either service would have him, and so to

endeavour to gild over by deeds of war the tarnish which had been contracted in civil life.

But, somehow, it did not suit Wolsey to turn warrior. Not that he was at all of a mild or pacific character. He was a quarrelsome, vindictive young man, but not exactly what was in those days called a fighting man. For ever getting into rows, he rarely came out of one with credit; but he had the art, by blustering with some, and defending himself to others, of maintaining a position in society, such as it was. Through county interest he had been presented with a commission of the peace; and his magisterial duties were special—that is to say, he was employed in the attesting of recruits for the army, and received a certain fee on each occasion of service rendered in this line. Nothing, so far as is known, was ever proved against him in the performance of these duties, but a great deal was whispered to his detriment. He had the credit of abusing “the King’s press damnably,” of taking douceurs from recruiting people to fasten doubtful cases on the service, and from the friends of the enlisted to buy off their services through the intervention of the law. His looks were rather in his favour, and he managed to hold his ground. His ill-usage of a lady in the Furze Range, whom he had jilted on finding her fortune to be less than he had supposed, made him disagreeable in some circles, but then his remaining a bachelor, and a possible well-connected match, procured him a welcome (not a warm one, it must be confessed) in others.

But another person has to be mentioned. There was now at the Hall a member of the family whom no one had expected to see there, and who had turned up in a sudden and imperfectly explained manner. Mrs Dunstan Salusbury, who had disappeared in her husband’s lifetime, had one day announced to Sir Chesterfield her survival in this sublunary scene, her presence in the country, and her desire to behold her sons. Such intelligence, one supposes, must have created the greatest excitement at the Hall. But no; startling though it was at first, it came to be regarded, as soon as it was an hour or two old, with remarkable *sang froid*. The baronet and his wife had grown too old to be susceptible of lively emotion; and the two young men, who scarcely remembered their mother, were curious as to her appearance and qualities. It should be noted that the letter in which she reopened communications with the Salusbury family, contained an assurance that her life abroad had been irreproachable since she left her husband, and gave reference to various official personages in foreign towns as to her respectable way of life.

Now, Sir Chesterfield, after his first surprise had passed off, began to inquire of himself what his daughter-in-law's motive could be for discovering herself to the family at this particular time. He could suggest only the most general answer to his own question; but considered it desirable to understand her designs, if possible. Ordinary persons, suddenly called upon to recognise a connection of this certainly not flattering kind, would decline the honour, and evade what would to them be simply an annoyance. But Sir Chesterfield had such a good opinion of his own wit, that he never looked upon a *rencontre* of the sort as an unmitigated evil. It might be intended as a move against his peace or his pocket; what then? He could parry it much more readily by facing it boldly; and he might do more, he might turn the incident to his own advantage, as he had frequently done in the past. On this diamond-cut-diamond principle, therefore, he thought he would like to have Mrs Dunstan under his roof for a short time, till he could learn her plans and abilities. She declared that she had never done anything to disentitle her to enter a respectable house, and Sir Chesterfield believed what was in his eyes of more importance than that—that she had never brought any widespread scandal on his name. He thought he would invite her to Traseaden Hall. But what would my lady say?

Happily, my lady's ideas were entirely in harmony with those of her spouse. She, poor soul, did not think of any intellectual encounter, of a plot to be avoided, or of a triumph to be gained; but she did think that she should like to have a companion of her own sex. And, if Mrs Dunstan should prove to have become somewhat weary of the world, and to incline to retirement and to matronly duties, as her letter gave some reason to suppose that she did, then Lady Salusbury thought that she might be invaluable. Of course she had, as soon as the proposal was made, given voice to misgivings about "the woman's character;" but Sir Chesterfield set before her what had occurred to himself on that head, and assured her that he did not think, as things now stood, there could be any objection to their receiving her. Let her give them a little of her society, and he would soon discover what sort of life she had been leading, and what life she now proposed to lead.

So Mrs Dunstan was invited to Traseaden Hall, and went thither, attended by a quiet middle-aged waiting-woman. "Been devilish good-looking; fine figure still," were Sir Chesterfield's mental remarks after he had received and welcomed her. She arrived under escort of her son Chatham, who had gone to conduct her over the latter stages of her journey, and

whose good opinion she obtained by her well-regulated manner towards him. Without pretending to violent affection, she at once established relations which could not be those between people who might be indifferent to each other. She showed herself to be lively, and to possess information quite up to Chatham's level, and he could not judge how much beyond it. He remarked that although she asked one or two questions regarding his grandparents, such as any one about to make their acquaintance might naturally ask, there was no attempt to draw from him cleverly information which might guide her in her behaviour towards them. Indeed, she was frank and open, giving the impression that she was anxious to please, and to be pleased. Poor Lady Salisbury, who seemed to have studied for the meeting, came into the hall in a much finer dress than usual, and greeted her guest not unkindly, but with some dignity; and the guest exactly responded by dropping a courtesy, and smiling as she touched her ladyship's extended fingers. Whereupon the great dame's heart smote her, she let her dignity escape, and she bent forward with a word of affection. To this change of mood Mrs Dunstan also accommodated herself, they kissed heartily, and the old lady's voice shook a good deal. Then they went hand in hand to the installation of the new-comer in her apartments.

By-and-by, when her ladyship returned alone to the library, she found her husband there.

"I think her so nice, Sir Chesterfield," said she.

"More excuse for poor Dunstan than I thought there was," answered he. "Sensible woman, without pretence of superiority or penetration."

Both of them were pleased; and even Wolsey, when he returned from his duties (there had been a great swearing-in that day), was charmed with his recovered parent. A sense of relief contributed to the satisfaction of the young men; they had feared lest some vulgar, *outré*, infirm, or otherwise disagreeable female should have demanded their duty, and made them ashamed of their origin.

The baronet that day evidently enjoyed his dinner much. He thought his daughter-in-law worth impressing favourably. He said pretty things to her, and smart things, told one or two brief anecdotes, made remarks on the Court, the war, and the leading topics of the day, without in the least making his hearer stare, or drawing her out of her depth. She did not pretend to vie with him in information, to relate brilliant little stories, or to despise polite sayings addressed to herself; only she contrived that it should appear that, if the stories and the remarks

were new, the world to which they belonged was familiar to her; and her manner of receiving compliments showed practice in that line.

When the ladies were alone after dinner, Mrs Dunstan quite naturally took the part of a listener. Old Lady Salusbury intended to have a little cheerful chat with her, but somehow in five minutes she was pouring out her griefs, telling of her long illness, of their small means in former days, of the unfortunate loss of her fortune, and many other troubles, the comfort of imparting which (though perhaps she knew it not) was the greatest she could enjoy, and had hitherto been the rarest. She, in fact, did the talking, and Mrs Dunstan put in appropriate interjections; but the impression on her ladyship's mind when the gentlemen at length joined them, was that the younger lady had been very entertaining.

To Sir Chesterfield's inquiry as to how she would be amused till supper-time, the widow replied that she was quite ready to join in any recreation that might be usual or agreeable. She didn't think she could play or sing to-night after her journey; but she could join—just so as not to make mistakes—in one or two games, or she would be glad to listen to anybody's music, or she would take part in conversation, which she greatly enjoyed. It was delightful to find that she did not dislike a rubber, though she pitied always her unfortunate partner, if he or she should be a proficient in the game. The gallant baronet said he would be her partner, if she would take him, and think himself rather to be envied than pitied; and they would challenge her two sons. Agreed; she would be happy. She never made but one condition with her partner at whist, and that, she was sure, would be unnecessary when she played with Sir Chesterfield Salusbury—she liked to be told of her mistakes after the game, not while it was in progress, because a sense of erring confused her. The baronet said that he proposed to take a lesson rather than to give one; and they sat down.

"Mistake!" said Sir Chesterfield, after they had played two rubbers of the long game. "Why, there wasn't the shadow of an error; a good steady game as ever I wish to see played. Why, you and I, madame, might hold our own against two dowagers of Bath."

"I am delighted not to have blundered," answered she. "But I know well that, to play whist with connoisseurs, one must do more than simply avoid gross errors. There is a far vision, and a profound calculation in really good play, which ordinary people may not hope to attain to."

"It is quite true," answered Sir Chesterfield, with some complacency, "that whist may be carried to great perfection."

"I suppose that, being just four in family, you frequently play," observed Mrs Dunstan.

"Unfortunately, no," answered Lady Salusbury. "I am so stupid that I am intolerable at whist; but I am not quite so bad at backgammon, and Sir Chesterfield often plays with me."

"A nice game, and not so silent as whist."

"Do you play it?"

"Not frequently. I think I know just the rudiments."

It was quietly done; there was no taking by storm; but Mrs Dunstan had certainly gained something of the goodwill and admiration of the family. She did not, upon better acquaintance, lose any ground, but rather gained unobservedly more. She had shown herself so conversant with the part of a fine lady, that poor Lady Salusbury gave up, with one of her deepest sighs, the hope of interesting her in any of the duties of the house. Then, what was her surprise, as well as delight, when Mrs Dunstan herself led the conversation to that subject, and evinced a familiarity with its details. Subsequently, when she showed that she was clever at confections, and that she could, with her own soft hands, perform some part of the cook's office, the old lady was astounded; but less astounded than pleased, for she seemed to have found the very friend for whom her heart had been yearning these many years.

The widow became Sir Chesterfield's opponent at backgammon, and allowed Lady Salusbury to doze gently in her chair, which was a great relief. She produced a guitar, which she touched cunningly, and accompanied herself in charming Spanish and Italian songs. But perhaps the most marked impression she made was one day when, after she had ridden boldly behind the harriers, her sons saw her tightening her girths, and adjusting her bridle to ease the horse's mouth. After this performance she mounted herself, and was in motion again as if nothing particular had occurred.

Of course a lady who could acquit herself well in so many ways easily secured a good reception for herself among the families of the Furze Range. As it had never been hinted before that Chatham and Wolsey had a mother living, there was a little awkwardness about announcing her return; but Sir Chesterfield and the widow between them managed to account for her long separation from them, and people, when they had once made her acquaintance, were too glad to possess it, and but little disposed to inquire how such an advantage had been brought about.

One word more concerning her early days at Traseaden Hall. She very soon, though quite accidentally, as it appeared, let the baronet know that she had means sufficient for all her wants. This was an immense relief to his mind. He had quite determined that she had sought their recognition with a view of extracting money in some way; and he had taken pains to frame ingenious excuses, which he had to temper more and more finely the more he became convinced that she was a woman of tact and experience. He was fairly perplexed, though not a little comforted, when he understood that she wanted none of his money. And he reverted with some pride to the argument with which he had comforted himself when they first heard of her again, and said, "Egad, I was right; it's (expletive) likely that she may prove an immense assistance, at any rate to the lady."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE INCONCEIVABLE HAPPENS.

Oakley, as has been said, felt obliged to decline the invitation to stay at Traseaden Hall; but he took an early opportunity of returning the M.P.'s visit, and when he did so, found only Sir Chesterfield and Lady Salusbury at home, the mother and her sons being all abroad, engaged in business or amusing themselves. The baronet had, of course, heard who Oakley was, and read of his exploits. He received him very kindly, indeed; took pains to impress him favourably, and succeeded. He manifested a great interest, as he knew how to do, in the navy; showed that he remembered the main incidents of a good many single actions; and was very indignant that more honours and quicker promotion were not secured to that service. Then it came out that Sir Chesterfield was personally acquainted with the Hon. Tuke Trigor, Oakley's old captain; and this was a new subject to talk about; and they discussed the mutiny which Trigor had quelled by his own courage, and at first with his single arm. The old gentleman thought that the exploit, as bruited about town, must be more or less a romance, and he was surprised to learn from Oakley (who had ascertained all about this remarkable occurrence, though it had happened before he made Trigor's acquaintance) that the common report, marvellous as it sounded, fell short of, rather than magnified, Trigor's wonderful coolness, decision, and bravery.

Then the host asked his guest if he would like to look round the gardens and stables (the kennel was rather too far off to be taken in the circuit), and, on Oakley assenting, assumed his hat and cane, threw a short cloak over his shoulders, and went forth. He was already booted, in a pair of tops, when Oakley arrived. In the course of their walk he expressed his deep regret that his daughter-in-law, Mrs Dunstan Salusbury, was from home that morning, and he could not present Oakley to her. "A charming, well-informed, sensible woman, Captain Oakley, though I say it. I quite expect you to agree with me when you see her, and that, I trust, will be soon; for you tell me you are already better, and the air of the Furze Range is most hospitable to invalids."

It is doubtful whether Sir Chesterfield had heard of Oakley's engagement to Una; at any rate, if he did know of it, he did not think proper to allude to it; and Oakley, of course, had by this time heard sufficient family history to make him refrain from introducing the subject. He thought the old baronet an improvement upon his Parliamentary son, and parted from him well pleased.

Chatham, it would seem, was chagrined at finding that Oakley's visit had been paid during his absence. He had taken a liking to Oakley, and did not wish acquaintance to be suspended, as it seemed likely to be, now that the return visit had passed. So he thought he would ride in to Veorse next day, and have another chat with the Captain. He did so. Oakley was not at the hotel; it was not expected that he would be there again that morning; but if the gentleman wanted to see the Captain particularly, he would, perhaps, not mind calling at Miss Clowance's, in the High Street, where he would be pretty sure to find him.

Now, Chatham Salusbury, if he had ever heard of the story of his great-uncle and Miss Clowance, had given little heed to it; indeed, it was altogether out of his mind. He did wish to see Oakley very much, and he thought there could be no harm in seeking him at a house where he was evidently spending the day. By a not very curious coincidence, Oakley, about the time of Chatham's call at the inn, was giving an account of his visit to Traseaden Hall the day before, and saying what he thought of old Sir Chesterfield. Miss Clowance had warned him that the old man was most perfidious, the embodiment of craft and treachery, and that his fair words and other civilities were mere deceit. Eleanor said that though she agreed entirely in her sister's estimate of Sir Chesterfield's character, yet she must admit that he was a very elegant man, who could be de-

lightful when he chose, and she was not a bit surprised that Felix had been favourably impressed by him. To which again Dorothy added, that she had only desired to put Felix upon his guard. They could not expect or wish him to adopt their quarrels in the third generation, and would by no means desire to shut him off from civility offered by people of standing. Only he must understand that they could never set foot again in Traseaden Hall, neither could any of the name of Salusbury ever enter a house, however humble, of which they were the owners.

While this was being said, horses' steps were heard in the street, and Doris Adair, who was nearer a window than the rest of the group, announced that a strange gentleman, a young genteel-looking man, followed by his groom, had stopped at the door. "Who can it be?" said Eleanor. "Probably a mistake," observed Dorothy. "People wanting Percival are often misdirected here."

There was no time for further remark, for the door opened, and the strange arrival was shown into the room. He entered with polite ease, bowed deferentially to the ladies, and shook hands with Oakley. Then he explained that, having been informed that Captain Oakley was in that house, and having a great desire to see the Captain, he had taken the great liberty of calling there; he hoped it would be forgiven him, and that Oakley would be allowed to present him by name. Which Oakley did. "Mr Chatham Salusbury, member for Caerlywmpthoedd; Miss Clowance, Miss Eleanor Clowance, Miss Una Clowance, Miss Adair."

Dorothy, at once recognising the stroke of fate, behaved with self-possession and dignity, requested Mr Salusbury to be seated, and said that he must have found it cold on horseback. No, Mr Salusbury had not found it cold; and he thought there would now be some mild weather, which he should be glad of for many reasons, not the least of which was that it would probably contribute much to Captain Oakley's recovery. Then he told Oakley how delighted he was that he had seen his grandfather the day before. "We think him, you know," said he, "a fine specimen of an old school, of whom there are not many remaining. He is too infirm to attend to the social duties which are expected of younger men, but when he is able to take his part he seems always to play it well."

Oakley said that he had been remarking that morning, indeed just before Mr Salusbury's call, on the baronet's polished manners and intellectual conversation. "I'm glad you were pleased with him," said Chatham; "but you will not see him

at his best till you see him at the dinner-table. What a world it must have been amid which he spent his youth; and how little sullied he seems to have come out of the ordeal!" The last fragment was uttered half in soliloquy, and, as might have been expected, roused Miss Clowance's indignation, who thought to herself, "This is a chip of the old block, cool, calculating, deceitful, villanous." But whether or not these epithets were justly applicable to Chatham, he was just now unconscious of any grievance having existed in the old time, and he was taking his part naturally, not exhibiting impudence and deceit. While he was making his remarks, Chatham stole, every now and then, a glance at Miss Adair, who was now recovering her looks after her recent illness, and he took the first opportunity that offered of addressing an observation to her.

"You have lately come to this neighbourhood, I think, Miss—Miss Adair. I hope I have remembered your name rightly."

"Quite right," Doris answered. "But I cannot think why you believe me to be a new-comer. I have lived in Veorse many years."

"Pardon me if I say that you have not lived anywhere *many* years. What I meant by regarding you as a stranger was, that I have never seen you come to look at the harriers."

"I do not ride," answered Doris; "I was never on horse-back in my life."

"Indeed! But many ladies come out on foot when we are hunting anywhere near. I thought I had seen all the fair of the place at one time or another."

"I never thought of going to see hunting," Doris said. "I don't think I should like it."

"You have other pursuits, no doubt. May one ask how you amuse yourself?"

"Well, as to outdoor amusements, we walk a good deal in fine weather. That is our principal resource."

"You enjoy fine scenery?"

"Very much."

"We have some beautiful views about Traseaden Hall, which I should have great pleasure in showing you."

Then, turning to Miss Clowance, he said: "My mother has lately joined us, and we are hoping to make the house once more a little lively. You would enjoy some of our views."

Dorothy was boiling, but she looked calm as she said: "I have lived many years, if my niece has not, and most of them have been passed in this neighbourhood. Not many of the views would be new to me."

With the instinct of a Salusbury, Chatham perceived that

either he had touched a raw somewhere, or he had been talking to a snappish, disagreeable old lady. He thought it, for the present, safer to turn again to Doris, to whom he said—

"My mother is very unlike you in one respect; she is quite at home on a horse, and indeed with a horse. Not only does she ride well, not only is she off and on her horse as quick as thought, and without assistance, but I believe she could do the grooming and keep the saddlery in order."

"I should feel ashamed and useless in the presence of one so clever," answered Doris.

"Forgive me if I say that I don't think you would. She can do these things, as I say, but she doesn't talk about them. You would never guess from her conversation that she was so wise about riding. She is not unfeminine. No, you wouldn't feel ashamed; you would like her."

"No doubt," answered Doris. "I was not uncertain about liking her. It is another thing whether so accomplished a person would condescend to me."

"I cannot fancy a person who would not feel honoured by your notice."

Then the man of the world managed to say a few sentences to Eleanor and Una, who had joined but little in the conversation, and prepared to take his leave.

"I came to see you," he said to Oakley, "in order that you might know that we shall be glad of another visit from you when you feel well enough and it may be perfectly convenient. It would be a great pleasure to us if we could see you accompanied by some of your fair relatives now present."

Oakley thanked him, but nobody else said a word in response to this, and then Chatham added that he hoped he might be allowed to improve an acquaintance so fortunately begun with Captain Oakley's relations, to which Dorothy said simply, "You are very polite, sir," as she courtesied adieu.

So Chatham departed. Miss Clowance in silence gathered up her work in preparation for withdrawing to her own room. "I never in my life," said she, "felt my temper so tried. The assurance! the impertinence! What shall we be subjected to next?" And she was gone.

"He isn't a disagreeable man by any means," said Eleanor, after a pause, in a guarded tone, as if she suspected that she might be doing wrong. "How odd that he should have come here! How the old place rose up before my mind's eye when he was talking of the views and the hounds! Many a time have I ridden after the dogs in Lady Salusbury's time—I mean *our* Lady Salusbury."

"There was nothing to take exception to in Mr Salusbury's behaviour to-day," said Una, who was pleased at his desire to be attentive to Oakley.

"That's right, my fairy," answered Oakley; "you are always candid and liberal."

Meanwhile Mr Salusbury was on his way to Traseaden, riding very slowly, and taking no note whatever of anything that he passed. "By all that's enchanting," said he at last, in low soliloquy, "that's the loveliest girl I ever saw in my life! Nothing like her in town or country either. Damme, there's blood (that's clear), and style, and beauty, and such a splendid figure and carriage! By, &c."

Chatham announced at dinner that he had seen that day the handsomest girl he had ever set eyes on. To which Sir Chesterfield responded: "The deuce! who can she be? I fear a disappointment; all your geese are swans, my boy."

"This, sir, is a swan and no goose, believe me," answered Chatham. "I was amazingly struck by her."

"And her name?"

"Adair."

"No such family in the county."

"She told me she had lived in Veorse for many years. She is a niece of some ladies named Clowance."

"Oh, really," answered the baronet, as if his ideas had been made clear on some indifferent point. "Oh, really! I used to know something of the Miss Clowances. They were connected in some way with my brother Wolsey's wife. Poor fellow! he left them some small legacy in his will, which, as executor, I had to see to the payment of. But they have not thought proper to visit here since I succeeded. How did you meet them?"

"Well, I went to their house. I heard that Captain Oakley was there; I wanted to see him, and——"

"Captain Oakley!" interrupted Mrs Dunstan. "Do you mean the officer who fought the Aiguille so splendidly a few months since? Is he in Veorse?"

"The same, certainly," answered Chatham, after a pause; "he is in Veorse, and a day or two since he was in this house. You saw him, sir."

"I did. And I hope that I may see him again. He is an exceedingly fine fellow."

The pause which has been noted above as preceding Mr Salusbury's reply to his mother arose from what everybody at table felt to be an unusual circumstance, although it seems hard to understand why it should have been so, when it comes

to be examined. The unusual occurrence was that Mrs Dunstan seemed to be taken a little by surprise at Oakley's being at Veorse. Now, ever since she had been at Traseaden, she had shown that she was well informed as to every matter of any interest that had been discussed. She did not assert superior intelligence, or make display of her knowledge; but she received every piece of information unconcernedly, as if it were already familiar, and afterwards would let drop little remarks and allusions which showed that she was apprised of all they had to tell. As to Oakley, they had had the advantage of her, and they were astonished to find that such was the case. No more was said on the subject, and they went off to another, not even spending further words on Chatham's beauty, although he would have talked of her in preference to anything.

After Mrs Dunstan retired that night, she had a long conference with her waiting-woman, Mrs Andover, the result of which was that she decided upon altering the fashion in which she wore her hair, also that certain trinkets were consigned for the present to her jewel-box, and other ornaments selected for wear.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WARFARE IN THE PYRENEES.

Meanwhile the victorious English army, having reduced the citadel of San Sebastian, marched away to take part in the last great struggle for the expulsion of the French from Spain, best known to us as the campaign in the Pyrenees. It had won lasting, well-deserved laurels at the siege; but they had been tarnished by some revolting and horrid deeds committed on the day when the town was taken. None bewailed these deeds more than the leaders and officers of the army. Some of the latter lost their lives in attempting to arrest the ferocity of the soldiers, into whom, after the success of the assault, a legion of fiends seemed to have entered. The troops who had stood so many hours of an August day on the breaches, "scourged with fire," as Napier said, but patient and disciplined, broke all bounds when they found that the town was at their mercy. But fortunately their misconduct on that day has no connection with this narrative. It is noted in passing as a blot which no Englishman, when mentioning this siege, should refrain from

showing his detestation of, a blot such as every Englishman, when he thinks of it, should pray that British troops may never again contract. The action passes on to fields in which the Peninsular veterans showed themselves as well disciplined, as sturdy, as irresistible as ever they had been, where they seemed never to rest, where they were always performing painful marches, or winning battles, where they proved to what a high degree endurance and achievement can be carried by human beings.

The activity and skill with which the generals on both sides handled their troops in the Pyrenees have never been excelled. The ground was so irregular that only a small portion of a field of battle could be seen at one view; and the leader, that he might the better overlook the field, was often posted on one hill, while his battle was going on on another, or on others. The seizing and holding a position was a matter of calculation, as well as of skill and courage. When moves, admirable in every other respect, had been arranged, it was often discovered that the transport of food and stores to fit the possible variations in the combinations, was found to be impracticable; and often this discovery was not made until a plan had been entered upon and was half executed. Out of such miscarriages as this arose the not infrequent misfortune of gallant men, who had been toiling in various ways for many hours, being for many hours left without food. The attacks, often developed on a sudden, had to be met by instant decision and by tactical skill available on the very shortest notice. The energies and talents of all were wrought up to the highest degree.

A quick eye and a ready pencil were of immense importance to an army which was fighting its way among difficulties like these, and L'Estrange was frequently relieved from regimental duty, that he might give to the staff the benefit of the hill-sketching ability which he had acquired a year before. An exciting experience it was that he had to pass through, carrying always his life in his hand, and advancing constantly into positions where destruction or capture was to be apprehended. It was only at intervals that he saw his comrades, and while he was separated from them, if he sometimes enjoyed the luxury of sleeping under a roof, he had also the privilege of living upon food such as dogs or pigs at home would hardly have been expected to put up with. This notwithstanding, the young man was healthy and in good spirits; and when he chanced to be examining the country quite alone, he had always agreeable contemplations to occupy him. It was ever growing more likely that an end might be put to the war; and when at the end of October they got word of the tremendous defeat of the

Emperor at Leipzig, expectation of peace became very high. L'Estrange felt how fortunate he had been in this last year of service, how much experience he had gained, how many dangers he had come safely through, and how successful this last part of his career had been. In a few months, perhaps, this wild and dangerous life might be exchanged for a peaceful sojourn in some garrison town; a depressing outlook, perhaps, to adventurous spirits who delighted in the vicissitudes of the field, and could pass

“From toil to rest, and joy in every change,”

but very cheering to one who had awaiting him so rich a reward. The day when he might return to Veorse and claim Doris for his own was no longer a wild expectation, a dream. Events, as they rapidly unfolded, more and more clearly indicated the dawn of a new era. And the young man's heart did dare now to form a definite hope that within a twelvemonth his happiness might be assured. He had gained rank in his profession, and possibly on the conclusion of the war he might be still further advanced. He had no hope of being a rich man, but he was possessed now of means sufficient to justify him in marrying; and, having attained field rank so young, he might reasonably look forward to reaching the top of his profession. But patience was still necessary. Though the end might be said to be in sight, there lay still a rough, toilsome road between him and it; and if he gave a little more rein to hope, he must relax nothing of his endeavours and exertions.

L'Estrange was profoundly ignorant of the notice which his duel and his adventure with Madame Valdez had attracted without the allied lines. Such affairs, amid the din of war, generally commanded but little attention. There was at most times plenty of adventures in which the army, or portions of it, were concerned to fill officers' letters, without the relation of private actions or bits of scandal; but the unlucky blockade of San Sebastian, while arrival of the stores was awaited, made a dull time, and forced correspondents to avail themselves of any incident that might be stirring. The young man little thought that while he was ceasing to remember Madame Valdez except as a disagreeable character who had crossed his path in the past, the little town of Veorse was exercising itself with his conduct regarding her, and his beloved Doris had been suffering torture from the bare thought of such a story proving true, and nerving herself to punish him, at whatever cost to herself, if he should fail to prove his innocence.

In many respects was L'Estrange unlucky in respect to this

visit of Madame Valdez. At the time when Lord Wellington was so angry about the duel, and threatened courts-martial to try the principals and seconds, L'Estrange determined that he would allow no one privately to question him about it. In this he acted wisely, so far as people merely curious were concerned. But he was irritated by unfounded and absurd statements which were strewed about, and did not fairly discriminate between idle gossips and people who would certainly not have meddled in the business save for his benefit.

Colonel Stanshon, having heard some of the reports that were going the round of camp, and perceiving how inconsistent they were with the account which L'Estrange had given him of the state of his affections, did not believe the stories. At the same time, he could not but admit to himself that something had taken place, which formed the ground of these reports, and which he would like to have explained before he mentioned the young man again in letters to his wife. The Colonel therefore made some attempt to obtain L'Estrange's own account of the matter. He chose an unfortunate occasion, when the ire of the Captain (he had not yet received his promotion) had been aroused by some, as he thought, impertinent remarks on the case. The consequence was that Stanshon got a short and haughty answer, which was all that the mind conscious of rectitude would condescend to return. Stanshon, who also felt that he, for the sake of doing right all round, had been led to take a part as intruder into another man's affairs, which was neither natural nor agreeable to him, resented this exhibition of dignity, apologised for what he had said with the very best motives, and retired. L'Estrange perhaps did not intend to be for ever mysterious with the Colonel, but thought he could enlighten him by-and-by, when the duel should have ceased to occupy attention.

Now it was in this behaviour to Colonel Stanshon that L'Estrange was particularly unfortunate. In the first place, it induced the Colonel to take a much worse view of the whole episode than he had before done. He began to think that L'Estrange had been to blame, and to lose some of the respect which he had been used to feel for his character. More than this, he did not choose, until his young friend should come round again, and treat him with confidence, to give him more news from Veorse. This might have been but a temporary punishment, only for the employment of L'Estrange under the Quartermaster-General, which took him away from his comrades and from the opportunities which daily intercourse would have afforded of putting this misunderstanding right.

Of course Colonel Stanshon was duly apprised of Oakley's return to his allegiance, and heartily glad he was at the news. He knew how interesting to L'Estrange would be the intelligence that Oakley was going to marry Una, but he refrained for the present from writing to him concerning any doings in the Furze Range. Had he said a word of the approaching marriage, it would have certainly produced a correspondence between L'Estrange and Oakley, and could not have failed to inform the former of what was being said to his injury in Veorse. But it was fated that L'Estrange was to remain in ignorance of these things, and that the happiness to which he was looking forward was to be the sport of evil chances, while he himself was to think himself the most miserable of men.

For the present, however, hope gave him energy to endure cheerfully a most toilsome life. The allied forces were fighting their way on, slowly but indefatigably, towards France. There was entire confidence in the ability of their chief to bring them victorious through the mountains; and the war rung incessantly among those rocks and valleys, inclining very rarely towards the French, but conceding at every periodical reckoning a substantial, if not an extensive, gain of ground to Wellington's army. L'Estrange was one morning in a small mountain village, the position and capabilities of which he thought it important to record, when the noise of a horse coming at speed along the narrow street attracted his attention, and he was aware of a British staff-officer's presence, the cause of the clatter. There was a fountain near L'Estrange, and he of the staff drew bridle for a minute to let his smoking steed just smell the water, and to bathe the animal's feet. The pause gave time for the briefest of colloquies.

"You are aware," said L'Estrange interrogatively, "that you are beyond our lines? I am sketching the ground, that is why I am in advance."

"Thank you. Yes, I know," said the other, never for a moment intermitting his attentions to his horse. "I chanced coming this way to get a little quicker at the third division, which is to come up with all speed. Two other officers are on the same errand by other routes."

"What is in the wind, do you know?"

"Only imperfectly. Soult has made some move in the night, or at daybreak, out of which our chief evidently expects to score a gain. All his staff are out for the purpose of producing a rapid concentration. I left him quite alone."

"Do you know where the action is likely to be?"

The officer was by this time in his saddle. He pointed as he moved off, and said, "Somewhere near that two-peaked hill. I think so, because the second division, which is there, has not been ordered to move; and I am to direct the third to the back of that hill." He waved his hand and was off again.

Now L'Estrange's regiment was with the second division. He had been directed to furnish, as soon as it should be ready, some information to the general in command of that division; and he could not resist the desire to go in at once with his information, there being just a chance that he might arrive in time to take his place in the ranks during the whole or some part of the coming encounter. He had the advantage of knowing something of the country—indeed of having its leading features and communications carefully delineated in his portfolio. So he started off, keeping well away from frequented tracks until he was within the limits of the region where the enemy's parties would scarcely dare to show themselves. He need not, however, have had much dread that day of straggling parties of the enemy; for Marshal Soult had his divisions well in hand that morning, he being about to take action in the hope either of defeating or of out-manceuvring the Marquis of Wellington.

Later on he fell in with an English division, with which he marched until it reached what he knew to be a spur of the hill which, from the position where he had his colloquy with the staff-officer in the morning, was seen to have two peaks. The firing indicated that some heavy work was going on either upon or close to this hill. Sounds of battle had been audible for some time; but such were its eddyings and echoes that it was hard to determine whence it proceeded, unless the smoke could have been seen (and they were on the wrong side of the hill for that), or unless they could have remained stationary for a period at no great distance from the battle. Stationary they soon became, with a little leisure to estimate the direction of the fighting and the proportions of it; for they were met by orders to halt for the present on the spur which they were then crossing, and to be ready at a moment's notice to pour down into a valley which wound below them on the right, or to ascend the hill by a route which was pointed out, and hasten to decide a combat on the farther and higher slopes.

It was plain from these directions that Soult's plan was not yet developed. He was playing a game of calculation. The firing might indicate the beginning of a great effort of force, which he hoped to be able to make with advantage of numbers, by concentrating more rapidly than we could do;

or it might be evidence of only a feigned violent attack, made for the purpose of attracting the energies of our force in that direction, in order that his way might lie open to the attainment of some position from whence our communications or our safety might be seriously threatened.

But Soult had to do with a mind quite as profound and as rapid as his own. The spot where the division to which L'Estrange had for the present attached himself was halted was admirably fitted for concealment. The spur, as it ran in towards the main mass of the hill, became flanked first by rocks and afterwards by projections which ran up like great buttresses. It seemed to have been formed by a landslide; for along the line where it touched the main hill, the latter ascended precipitously, with a bare scarp at first, and above that with an overhanging face thick with grasses and shrubs, a tree standing on it here and there. Part of another division marched on to this same plateau (as it may be called when compared with the declivities above and around it) before any further order arrived. But the firing on the other side of the mountain never ceased. Its noise rose and fell often, but on the whole increased perceptibly. At length came an order to move round and up the mountain, to support the troops which were already engaged.

The long halt had refreshed the troops, and now, on the word being given, they stepped out with vigour. Their way was rough, and at times very steep, but they climbed with good heart, and after some time could see the smoke rising above the highest peaks and ridges, which sign told that they would soon be in view of the field of battle. This was, however, to be attained by only one approach, which, being circuitous, gave them yet some trial of patience. It brought them at last to a gorge which seemed as if it had been formed by a convulsion of nature, which broke through the mountain's highest ridge, leaving a deep chasm walled by rocky heights and detached rocks.

As L'Estrange, by this time somewhat out of breath, entered this pass, he became aware that there had been there very recently some rather smart fighting. Heaps of dead lay on the ground, with Frenchmen among them, but formed partly of our troops. Arms were scattered in many directions; the large stones were marked with blood and torn cloth; the smell of the powder hung about the place. Small parties were still moving the wounded, and at different points surgeons were busy with cases that could not be moved. L'Estrange had observed with some emotion that many of the fallen wore

the uniform of his own regiment. As he passed on he saw two men of the same regiment bending over some object which lay behind a large stone. He stepped aside to ascertain what it was, and saw, stretched on the ground, with his head pillowed on a knapsack, a British officer badly wounded. It must be a comrade.

Instantly L'Estrange went to the group. The face of the wounded man was turned from him, was in shadow, and was contorted with suffering. As L'Estrange bent down to examine the features, he said to the men who were attending, "Is it one of ours?" and the answer was, "It is, sir." But before more words could pass, L'Estrange, whose face was now very near to that of the sufferer, caught the feeblest possible breathing of his name "Fred," and a horrid chill ran through him. "Don't say it's you, Pat," murmured he, hardly knowing what he said. "Faith it is," was the answer; then, after a pause, again in almost inaudible tones, "Sure, I'm dead tired."

"Don't speak, Pat," said L'Estrange, "here are two of our men who will tell me about you. Keep quite quiet now." Then, looking up at the men, he asked, "Has a doctor seen him?"

"He has, sir," one of them answered. "It was the doctor that bound him up; said we were to let him lie quiet here."

"I'll be back directly, Pat," he whispered; and he sprung up, and began to make his way back again down the pass, along which the columns of the division with which he had arrived were still pressing. In a few minutes he came up with one of the surgeons whom he had before passed, who was just leaving a sufferer for whom he had done all that he could. "Allow me to ask, sir," said L'Estrange, "whether you are the officer who attended to Captain Perrin a short time ago, who is lying farther up the pass."

"I dressed an officer's wounds up there as well as I could. I don't know his name. Has anything happened?"

"Only that I have seen him. He is a brother officer of mine. Will you be so good as to tell me of his condition. I have but now arrived with the division which is passing."

"His condition is bad enough. He's shot, and stabbed, and cut—all badly."

"Can he be moved?"

"There's nowhere to move him to at present better than where he lies. His regiment's engaged, and when I left to come here and look after the fallen it was expected there'd be hot work again as soon as the fresh troops were up. Whenever there's quiet we'll have him moved into shelter if he's alive."

"Thank you. I'll not detain you longer from your duties;" and with a great sickening of heart he moved back to where the Spalpeen lay.

"Pat, my dear fellow, you'll have to keep easy here till the field is clear. I hope they'll soon have you under cover."

Perrin's voice was a little stronger than it had been before as he said slowly, and with breaks, "I paid him off. We're quits now."

"I've no doubt you did. But don't fatigue yourself with speaking," answered his friend, who believed either that his mind was wandering, or that he had had some desperate personal encounter. "Make a sign if you're thirsty," added he. "No," answered Pat. "It's the Colonel I paid off." And at the same moment one of the soldiers, who had heard L'Estrange's question, said, "The doctor gave him drink, sir."

A few more words passed. It was plain that there was nothing more to be done immediately for Perrin's relief. L'Estrange, with his heart full, tore himself away, and strode on with the column. It was not many minutes before he was clear of the defile, and in sight of the field of battle, so far as its broken surface would allow it to be seen. There was smoke along the whole crest of the hill. Here and there, at intervals, could be descried bodies of red-coated troops, but what was being done, how the day was going, could not in the least be discerned by any one debouching from the pass. All that L'Estrange could judge of was, that the division with which he had come was forming to its right, and opening fire as the regiments came into position.

But there was an eye looking over a hooked nose, on a peak half a mile off, the owner of which understood the situation perfectly, and was well satisfied with what was now passing. He had for long been in doubt whether Soult intended really to dispossess him of this hill, or whether the attack on the hill was to cover a forward movement by the valley. He had suffered an unequal fight to be waged by the second and another division, against considerable odds, while the doubt remained. But he had at length become convinced that the French leader meant in good earnest to seize the hill; and no sooner was his conviction formed than he sent, over rocks and through bush and brier (for the road was not open), to bid the divisions which were halted below to move up.

Their appearance very much altered the state of things. They were enabled to come into action almost on the flank of the attacking French, whom their fire at first galled and then staggered, while our second division, which had been sustaining

the attack, was enabled to gain a little ground. The French were greatly disconcerted for a time, and in some places they were charged with the bayonet and dislodged. To yield ground was to go down hill. But Soult was already moving up masses in support. His masses, however, had to come up the hill, on the crest of which, and well posted, our troops already were. They pushed up to the encounter in the style in which French troops of those days always advanced. They believed, when Soult gave the word to go up and take the hill, that his combinations, for which he had been waiting, were now complete; that the tactical advantage was already with them, and that it remained only for their valour to finish what their chief had so well begun. And they came on with the *élan* of troops to whom the fight was rapture and the victory assured. Making nothing of rocks, or underwood, or steepes, the gallant columns, climbing, leaping, or forcing way through the shrubs, bore forwards, not shouting, because it was of importance to avoid getting out of breath, but with the assurance of men who would have shouted had there been voice to spare.

They were allowed to get within short range before they were received with a heavy fire. When that was delivered, they became aware of how many, and how well disposed, were their foes. The array in front they might have known how to deal with; but obliquely to the English front, much concealed by the vegetation and the broken ground, extended the reinforcement which had lately come up. The French found that the heads of their columns were in an angle contained by two lines of British, who now poured their fire on front and flank. Their confident rush was checked, their men fell thickly. They saw that their difficulties were greater than they expected. But to them a difficulty was only a call upon their courage and resources. A continual stream of them was surging up the ascent. Their leaders at once made a change in the order of attack, so as to diminish the fire on the flanks of columns. Yet when this was done, there stood the enemy, equal in numbers to themselves, formed on ground of their own choosing, and more than half of them fresh. They (the French) were coming up blown and disjoined; and everywhere they were received with a fire which forbade their acquisition of any ground which they could hold. In truth, instead of taking they gave ground. But in doing so they fell back on their comrades, who were still mounting the steep, and at once they were rallied and formed for a fresh effort.

By this time they had better got the measure of their enemy, and they were not long in devising how he must be

assailed. An attempt was made to roll up, by over-running its flank, the division with which L'Estrange had come up; but the hardy veterans who composed it threw back their flank as quickly as the enemy made his arrangements for the assault, and were once more in a position of advantage, and made their fire tell terribly. Wellington, however, saw from where he stood that this division, by retiring its flank to meet the changed attack of the French, had uncovered ever so little the pass by which it had come up, and which was, in fact, the only line of retreat. He therefore sent down orders to force the enemy from the ground which he had taken with the intention of overlapping our line.

Meanwhile Soult, when it was too late to arrest the battle, had found that Wellington had been beforehand with him, and had forestalled him by a precious quarter of an hour. He had known nothing of the divisions which had waited so long on the shoulder at the back of the hill, until he saw them moving on to the field, and even then he could not plainly make out their strength. His columns were not only in motion, but nearly up to the point of contact, when he discovered that we had been reinforced; and there was nothing for it now but to make the attack with his whole strength, and trust that it might yet be successful. So they had thrown themselves on our position, as has been said.

But the losses of the French from our fire were very great, and they soon saw that they must act not only boldly but quickly if they would win. Therefore, at the same time when the movement to outflank was tried, a most vigorous push was made against our position at many of its points. In one or two places the French, by desperate valour and with heavy loss, did succeed in wresting some ground from our troops. But the successes were small, and at long intervals of space, while, on the whole, the fierce attack failed, and the French once more gave ground.

At this time it was that Wellington's order arrived to force back the enemy from view of the pass. It was obeyed in the very first style. The French, already checked, and disposed to hesitate about their next move, felt their own position assailed, wavered for a space, and then retreated in some haste, followed by our troops. The offensive movement was catching, for those of our side who could see it tried a little advance on their own account, which had the effect of exciting their next neighbours to a similar move, and soon there was a general attack upon the French. As the little burst in the offensive mode on our flank was imitated along all our line, so the concession of ground

made by the enemy at the same point seemed to infect the whole of his columns. There was some confusion, and in many instances a retrograde tendency. Seeing which our troops pushed on until the French columns were in decided and tumultuous retreat. It was not far back to the brow of the hill, below which nothing like an orderly descent could be performed in haste or under pressure. Our soldiers knew this; and, seeing that their opponents were being borne back towards the precipitous ground, they charged home upon them with a cheer, and so decided the fortune of that day. With the steeps behind them, and the rushing foe with his steel pointed in front, the French were soon in hopeless rout, our men wounding them, and hurling them down the mountain's side. They had not only failed in their attempt, but they lost men very heavily.

Wellington had not fought this battle simply that he might hold his ground. His success made it possible to seize some points more in advance, from which the retreat of the beaten French might be molested, and their endeavours to take up a new line of defence thwarted. So there was little rest after the heavy fight, but all was again in motion.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW FERRIN HELD THE PASS.

It was not until after the action that L'Estrange was able to rejoin his regiment. When he came up with it, his first communications with his friends had reference to Perrin, and the disposal of him. They knew well of his case, and were already sending out a party to his assistance. The expectation all round was that they would find only his lifeless body; for the regiment knew pretty well the causes of his condition. L'Estrange was able to assure them that he was alive when the reinforcements marched up, and that he had spoken at that time; but, in truth, he had little hope of finding him alive now. However, he went off with the party, and had the satisfaction of finding Perrin still alive, though nothing better could be said of him. The poor fellow was attended to in every way that was then possible. All the wounded fared hardly enough; but Perrin, to whom every one who knew him was

a friend, was not the worst cared for of the sufferers. The doctors would not say a hopeful word regarding him; that was the most distressing part of the matter. He had been terribly punished; and more than one of his wounds were likely to prove mortal.

This duty over, and Perrin left to such repose as he could get, L'Estrange was not unwilling to join one or two brother officers, who, in a hollow of the hill, were snatching a moment, before moving again, to take such rude refreshment as the circumstances permitted.

"Tell me about Perrin's wounds. How came he to be so terribly used?" said L'Estrange to one of them.

"Well, I believe he got that pass to hold. Somebody said the Marquis himself told him off to it. I don't know what happened, because I've been busy enough with my own company; but we are all well enough acquainted with Perrin to be sure that he'd never yield ground while he could stand."

"No, no; that's certain enough," agreed they all.

This was not very explanatory; and it was a long time before L'Estrange arrived at a clear understanding of the matter, although he was constantly picking up the facts. The truth was, that Captain Perrin had been entrusted with what proved to be an almost desperate service; and as the way in which it fell to his lot, and the accidents of the adventure were somewhat curious, it may be worth while to put in a condensed form the story which, by fragments, and with circumlocutions and contradictions, L'Estrange was able to put together.

It seems that, on the morning of the day of battle, the regiment, all together, but not standing to their arms, were lounging on the part of the hill where they had bivouacked. There was a general expectation of *something* occurring, because Marshal Soult had been seen very busy on a neighbouring height; but what that something was to be was not so easy to understand. An impression, however, prevailed that he had wicked intentions towards the hill on which they then stood. He did not hurry himself to begin, and on our side all remained in an easy attitude of waiting.

Suddenly some excitement was created by the appearance of a mounted officer galloping in. As he came nearer, his figure and face were seen to be like those of their great Commander-in-Chief; but this was not the style in which field-marshal generally move—unattended, unannounced. But the doubt was soon resolved. When he came up to the first group of soldiers, the officer reined up and asked where he should find the general officer commanding the second division. There-

upon he was recognised as Wellington, and the men raised a shout, which was taken up by regiment after regiment, until the whole force had joined in the cheer, and the echoes of the surrounding hills were awakened. The general of division, of course, came to meet him, and there was a short colloquy between them, after which the Marquis made a close inspection of the ground. He was informed, of course, that Marshal Soult in person had lately been within view of where he stood. This, he said, was good news; for, as he explained, Soult was a thorough commander, and would not commit himself to any action until he could understand the meaning of the shouting which our men had lately sent up. "This hesitation," added Wellington, "will give time for the divisions which I have sent for to come up; and it will be hard if we don't get the best of this game."

This was, then, the explanation of the great man having arrived quite alone. He had employed every one of his staff in taking orders to different stations to call up supports without delay. It was soon understood that there would be some work before the day was much older. A sharp watch was kept upon the proceedings of the enemy; but for a time no order was given. During this interval the Field-Marshal moved about among the troops, and spoke to officers here and there. When he came up to L'Estrange's regiment, and the colonel and officers stood to receive him, he told them he quite expected their position to be attacked with more or less violence; that he hoped to have up an ample force in good time; but happen what might, that the hill must be held. Then, running his eye over the group of officers, as was his wont, in order that he might say something encouraging to an individual, he caught sight of Captain Perrin, whereupon he said: "Met you somewhere lately, sir, I think?" to which the Captain (who was not bashful, nor easily taken aback) replied: "Ye did, me Lord; 'twas after the false attack on the brache at San Sebastian."

"Yes, yes. Remember now. Rather a hot thing. Mustn't forget your swimming." And the chief moved on to exchange a remark or two with others. His recognition of the Spalpeen, however, had made that young man a person of some note for the occasion. And, as the fortune of war would have it, it brought the poor fellow into the sad plight in which he was seen a page or two back. And this was the way of it.

Before long the drums beat to arms. Their ground was assigned to the regiments on the hill, and they were bidden to await the enemy's attack. But the Commander-in-Chief, whom nothing escaped, perceived that there were but two ways in

which troops could move off the crest where they were, in anything like order. By one of these roads the enemy would advance to the attack; the other lay through the pass which has already often been mentioned. It was necessary to keep a fast hold of this pass as our only means of communication; and orders were given to have it secured. The general of division desired Perrin's colonel to secure it with seventy-five men. And the colonel looked round on the fine young men commanding his companies, to select one for the important duty. He had remembered Pat's escapade when they were escorting the stores, and had registered a resolution against trusting that young man again in any separate charge. But then he thought of the Marquis's recent notice of Pat, and reflected that the duty now to be done was one in which an officer could hardly exceed in the way of fighting. Captain Perrin's infirmity, therefore, would not be likely to mislead him on the present occasion. And so the colonel decided to give the command to Perrin, which would not have happened but for Wellington's recent notice of him. The men were told off, three subaltern officers appointed to them, and then Captain Perrin was desired to fall out. "You are to guard that pass, sir. It is of consequence; and it is to be held to the last extremity."

"Ay, sir. I'll hold it," were Captain Perrin's words, as he saluted and took command of his party.

Perrin reached his post, and there was still some delay, for, as Wellington had divined, Marshal Soult was disturbed by the cheering which had come from the English position, suspected that reinforcements might have arrived, and was very guarded about making his attack. Wellington, meanwhile, having been joined by one or two of his staff, found a place from which he could see not only the position of his troops on the hill, but the roads by which he expected the other divisions to move. He had the satisfaction of seeing them on the march before the attack began, and he felt how fortunate it had been that the cheering of his men had been heard by the enemy.

Thus Perrin had time to examine his position, and to make his arrangements. On one side of the pass the ground was so difficult that it seemed impossible to turn his position by scrambling along the heights there. On the other side, though the passage must be a work of extreme trouble, yet it might be achieved in time by resolute men. He therefore trusted entirely to natural obstacles for protection on the one side; but on the other he bade a few men to climb up, to keep a look-out, and also to drive back as well as they could any of the enemy who might attempt to cross. The pass was so narrow that his

front was very small ; but there were convenient rocks and banks opening away right and left at the mouth of the pass, behind each of which he bestowed one or more men. Moreover, at its gorge, before the sides or walls became quite perpendicular, it was possible to get a snug position here and there higher up, so as to have two tiers of side or flanking fire. At a convenient position deeper in the pass, where he had the advantage of a few rocks and fallen earth and trees, he made a similar arrangement, except that his muskets were here on only one level ; and he held ten or twelve men in reserve, under an officer. All this being arranged, Pat thought he would climb up to the summit of the heights, and see how the men whom he had sent thither had been able to dispose themselves. This he did ; and he saw that they were well planted, and that they understood why they were sent up. As he was making his way down again, which he did at the expense of torn clothes and scratched hands, he heard the first sounds of battle ; for by this time the French marshal had determined to attack the position, and his troops were coming into action. There they fought for long without attaining their object, although they were cheered now and then by some temporary success, until the time came when Soult launched his main force at the hill, and Wellington brought round his divisions, as has been narrated. But it is not with the early stages of this main fight that one need now be most interested. There was something to happen in the pass.

It need hardly be said, that as soon as the French troops were in any force on the crest of the hill, and were occupying the attention of the British, their leaders, always collected and thoughtful, took a survey of the field, and made a short study of its features. Very soon it was apparent that the pass, now occupied by Perrin, was the only way of retreat off the top of the hill, except the road by which the French had mounted to the attack. They had not the smallest intention of letting the red-coats retire by this latter route ; and as they had come up with the benevolent design of giving them a sound beating, they thought it might be well to deprive them also of the retreat by the pass, so that they might have to wait and be thoroughly cut up.

A little examination convinced them that the pass was occupied ; but what of that ? They outnumbered the English, and could certainly find a few companies for such a laudable work as forcing this defile, and then holding it. It should be stated that at this time of the day our force on the hill was far too small to permit of its extending (as was done afterwards when the reinforcements came up) and covering the mouth of

the narrow way. So, having a few men to spare, the Frenchmen made at the pass.

"Now, boys!" called out Captain Perrin to his detachment, by way of warning that the time was come when the instructions which he had lately given were to be followed. The enemy advanced in a narrow column, but when they saw the pass clearly, and how strait it was, they had to make their front still narrower. They were not quite clear yet how their work would have to be done; and so they advanced at first silent and steady, without pulling a trigger. Perrin let the head of the column come well within range, and into the mouth of the pass, before he offered any token of his regard. Then he swept away literally the head of the column, which received a shower of fire in front and flank. Perrin's front rank (a very small front) then stepped aside to the cover of some stones, and loaded, while the men who had stood behind them got a chance of delivering their fire. When loaded, the front rank resumed its place, and began again. The enemy had not fired a shot. He was staggered. The French stood yet a little while, that their commander might take in the whole of the situation, and then, in good order, withdrew out of range, leaving a considerable number of killed and wounded.

That first advance may have been called a reconnaissance. The attacking force had been withdrawn only that measures might be taken in accordance with what had now been ascertained to be the state of things. Immediately some men were despatched to try the heights on both sides of the pass, and to discover whether the position could be turned. Parties were to advance on either flank, to find what cover they could, and to try and occupy the musketeers whom Perrin had stationed in the bushes and rocks to right and left of his front. Then the French column, able to show as broad a front as the English, were to try their luck once more in attacking the pass. Perrin had not lost a man, and he had gained time.

The French came on again. Perrin reserved his fire as before; but the enemy's parties which had been appointed to that work sent some shots into his flanking musketeers, and prevented their showing themselves and taking aim as they had done before. The column received Perrin's fire; but while his front men were loading, they poured into the pass a well-directed volley, and then pushed briskly forwards. Perrin put his front into order, and was able to deliver another round, which rather checked the enemy's advance. The men on the flanks, too, only partially incommoded, were able to punish them a good deal. Notwithstanding which, the French this

time marched right up to the gorge, and looked as though they had made up their minds to get in. But once more loaded men had worked to our front, and there came a rattle and a well-aimed discharge, which damped their resolution. It was in vain that they poured on, men stepping up and taking the places of those who had fallen. No impression could be made, and they were losing three to our one.

The French commander now, leaving some men to keep up a fire upon our front, once more withdrew his column, and re-formed it, his object being to attempt to force the pass with the bayonet. Meanwhile the report of a musket on the heights told Perrin of the attempt which the enemy was making in that direction, and caused him to send a few of his reserve to discover if possible some way by which they might scramble up from the pass, or from the rear of it, to the assistance of those on the top. He knew that now the Frenchman would make his grand attack.

The parties which had been endeavouring to silence the fire of Perrin's flank defences were now augmented and employed as skirmishers. They came on, suffering a good deal, but steady, and watching for chances of hitting red-coats here and there. At the same time with them the re-formed column advanced for the third time, coming steadily along without firing. The column sustained Perrin's fire, and was within fifty yards of his men, when the skirmishers suddenly dashed in and up among the rocks and other cover, seeking to dislodge the flanking bodies therefrom. They made this rush as demonstratively as might be, shouting and firing so as to distract attention. Then the head of the French column fired a volley, and in the smoke made a dash with the bayonet. Perrin, however, had anticipated their game. Our men met the charge firmly, and the front rank, who had stepped aside to load as before, fired into the head of the column as it passed the gorge, and then charged into both flanks. The few French who first entered were every one struck down; but the assaulting column was strong, and pressed on with all its weight. It was vigorously withstood, and there was a fierce hand-to-hand struggle in the gorge. Every man had his work to do, and Perrin laid about him to his heart's content. He had a scuffle with a tall fellow, within whose guard he contrived to get, and nearly severed his right hand from the arm, yet the stout fellow kept a hold of his musket with the left hand, and kept his place in the fray. Perrin got a prick from a bayonet, and shot with his pistol the man who had given it; but this fallen enemy thrust at him from the ground, and gave him a serious wound. He bled, but contrived temporarily to stanch his wounds, and remained on the field.

The flanking fire outside the gorge was by this time subdued. Some of our men had been reached by the enemy and killed, and a few had made their way in to their comrades. Thus the attacking column which remained outside the gorge was unmolested, and at liberty to take measures for the promotion of the attack. The officer in command determined now to send the whole weight of his column against the defenders, to force his own leading ranks upon the bayonets (if so it must be) of the British, and so at any cost to pass the gorge. It was thus that suddenly, whilst the *mêlée* was at its liveliest, the combatants on both sides found themselves carried along the pass by an irresistible momentum from outside.

Captain Perrin had foreseen that this might occur, and his orders to his second line of defence had been to let nobody pass, friend or foe, if the tide of the conflict should roll towards it. When the rush was made, his first thought was of this order, and he contrived in the torrent to get within call of the officer in charge of his second line, and to shout to him "Remember." But the young man required no reminding. He was posted in a very narrow part of the chasm, and he had no difficulty in showing a determined front. His bayonets gleamed bright and thick from wall to wall of the pass. The steel staggered the foremost and the bravest of those who had been borne along; with an immense effort they reacted against the pressure of the French column, which, indeed, was by this time somewhat spent, and caused the tide of the battle in some degree to ebb again. Advantage was taken of the momentary lull to let our wounded slip through the second line, and for the unwounded to get into some order once more, rallying upon the same second line. Thus the battle was restored, and our men of the second line were able to pour in a volley over the shoulders of those in front. The enemy had got the gorge in which Perrin's front defence had been posted, but that did him little good—nay, in one respect it was embarrassing, because, in consequence of its narrowness, he was unable to accumulate on the second line as great a momentum as had been used against the first.

While things were momentarily in the state which has been described—that is to say, while the second barrier, stern and dangerous, faced the French column, and the latter, without turning, looked with a rather abated appetite at the hedge of steel—a French officer made his way to the front, addressed some words of encouragement to his compatriots, and essayed to lead them straight on to the bayonets. Perrin saw his act, and before the Frenchmen had had time to understand his

design, or to set themselves in motion to follow him, threw himself in his path, and attacked him vigorously with his sword. The young officer instantly accepted Perrin's challenge, and crossed swords. He speedily proved himself to be at least as good a swordsman as his antagonist; and he was un wounded, while Perrin was badly stabbed and otherwise hurt. The Irishman's will was as strong as ever, and he laid about him with a mischievous intent; but his adversary was cool and skilled, and in nowise daunted by Perrin's fierce attack. He parried the early blows that were aimed at him, and after cleverly turning death aside in this manner, he at last got an opportunity at Perrin's hip, which he gashed viciously. The wounded man did not, however, fall, but still attempted to maintain the conflict. This it was impossible to do with any effect. He could hardly steady himself on his legs, far less could he guide his weapon with anything like cunning. He felt that he was failing, and might not, probably, keep his legs for many seconds, and, in the hope of knocking his man over by his superior weight, he rushed at him. But the Frenchman had all his wits about him, and caught the unlucky Spalpeen on his sword's point, standing aside to let him fall, which he could not help doing after the forward movement which he had given to his weakened limbs. Two minutes after that the young Frenchman was himself brought down by a shot.

The firing was brisk as long as the French hesitated, but they soon made a rush at the second line again, only partially shaking it, and the whole of them being finally repulsed. They might have annihilated our poor fellows, and so been masters of the pass, had there been time for the destruction; but their opportunity was over. Perrin's task had been achieved. The English were suddenly taking the offensive in the main struggle, and the French were not long in discovering why this was done; for some men scrambling down from the rocky heights reported that a large English force was on its march round the back of the hill, and was close to the pass. Soult's reinforcements, as has been said, were not up, Wellington having been beforehand with him, and the French general, not quite knowing what to expect, and certain that the pass could not be held, and probably could not now be gained, called in the force that had been attacking it to aid the dispositions which he would make under the altered circumstances. As soon as the pass was approachable by our side, surgeons and men to attend to the wounded entered it, and the state of things obtained which L'Estrange found when he marched in with the divisions which arrived in support, as has been narrated.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WAY TO MAUNDER'S WELL.

Mrs Dunstan Salusbury and her waiting-woman, after they had made the arrangements about hair and ornaments to which attention has been already drawn, discussed several other subjects before the lady sought her pillow. They talked of Captain Oakley and of Miss Adair.

"There is," said the mistress, "a young lady—a beauty, as I hear—named Adair living in Veorse. She resides with people named Clowance. I wish, Dando, to know who and what she is."

"That will be found out without much difficulty," answered Mrs Andover. "Everybody here is ready enough to tell all they know. Not like some people that we have had to deal with."

"No. I daresay Miss Adair's history may be ascertained without risking one's life or liberty. But there is another matter which it will rather startle you to hear: Captain Oakley is in Veorse."

"The captain of the Aiguille?"

"The captain who lately commanded the Aiguille. He has been promoted now to higher rank, and has left the gallant little sloop."

"You astonish me. Whatever is to be done? Will you leave Traseaden? Will you——"

"Nonsense, Dando. You forget your old coolness and patience—the effect of leading too easy a life. Let us find out first whether there is anything connected with his coming to Veorse which need be of particular interest. We must ascertain where he is staying in Veorse, why he is staying there, and how long he is likely to remain. We have managed more difficult inquiries ere now. After these things are all clear, it will be time enough to consult about taking action of any kind."

"You are right. I should think that by this time to-morrow all you want to know may be discovered. I will put things in train at once. Have the Portuguese merchants in London been desired to conceal your present address?"

"In a general way they are so instructed; but it may be well to give a particular caution at present. I will write at once. My letter will be ready in a quarter of an hour. If

you will go now and make any arrangements which you may propose before the household is all gone to bed, you will find the note ready on your return, and it can be sent to the post by the first opportunity in the morning."

"Very well," answered Mrs Andover as she withdrew.

Mrs Salusbury knew something about the Clowances and their former relations with the Salusbury. When she heard her son speak of Miss Adair as a relation of theirs, an idea rapidly formed itself in her mind, and she was anxious to know how far it might be worth preserving there. "For," said the widow to herself, "if there should ever turn out to be anything wrong about that silly old baronet's succession to the property, it might not be a bad thing to be secure on both sides. This charming young lady may be a near relation of the ladies who thought themselves so unjustly dispossessed; in that case they would scarcely dispute the property with her husband. Yea, chance has suggested a web which may be worth the weaving."

Perhaps the last idea that could have occurred to Chatham Salusbury that night was, that his mother was thinking about Doris Adair as intently as he was. He got very little sleep, and he did not desire it; he preferred to lie awake and muse on the young lady who had charmed him so. Such musings were sure to include the prospect of seeing her again, and as Chatham tossed on his bed he thought anxiously of how another sight of her might be procured. He remembered that Doris had said they walked into the country a good deal. Now, if he could contrive to meet them, as it might seem by accident, when they were walking, possibly an acquaintance might be formed.

The consequence of this cogitation was that Chatham was in Veorse early the next day, and that he put up his horse at the inn. He then betook himself to a back street of the town, where he sought a little untidy house, the home of one of the men who were employed about the kennel at Traseaden. Entering this, he found the mistress of it bending over a tray and up to her elbows in soap-suds.

"Good morning, Mrs Billet," said Chatham. "Busy washing, as usual?"

"Yes, your honour," answered Mrs Billet, as she wiped her arms; "there's a deal to do in that way."

"Don't let me disturb you, Mrs Billet. Pray go on with your washing. I can talk to you just as well. I came in to ask if you would help me in a little matter, as you have sometimes cleverly done before."

"Anything as I can do, your honour, I shall be always

'appy," answered Mrs Billet, who knew that the service asked of her would be well requited.

"Well, to come to business at once, I want to know if you can tell me anything about a young lady who is living with the Miss Clowances—Miss Adair?"

"Which I believe she is the niece, daughter of a sister what is dead," answered Mrs Billet, outwardly calm, but inwardly wondering what was astir, because she had already received a fee that morning for furnishing information concerning the same young lady.

"Her home is with these ladies, is that it?"

"That is about it, sir; and a charming young lady she is. Many's the one that admires her."

"I am told she is fond of exercise—that she walks a good deal."

"Bless her! that she do. She and her aunt what's to marry the sailor officer be often in the air o' fine days; leastways they used, but I don't think I see 'em so regular now."

"Do you mean that Captain Oakley is going to marry one of the ladies?"

"Ay, certain I do, your honour, the soft quiet one with the gracious face. We shan't hardly thank him for taking of her away."

"He is going to take her away, is he?"

"So 'tis said. And for certain they isn't preparing of no 'ouse here, which doesn't look as if they meant to stop."

"No, certainly. But, after all, this is not the business I came about. You say that Miss Adair often walks. Is she likely to be out to-day?"

"Well, of a day like this, a month or two ago, she and Miss Una (that's she as is agoing to marry) would ha' been out as sure as the day. But, as I was a saying, I don't seem to see 'em so regular now, sir."

"It is very fine weather," said Chatham.

"Ay, it is that, sir," answered Mrs Billet.

"Now, do you think, Mrs Billet, that you could leave your washing for a little and go and keep an eye upon their door? If you saw any of them going out, you might tell me."

"If you please, sir," answered Mrs Billet, dropping a courtesy, "to oblige your honour I can put off the washing for a bit; and I should like to change my dress, sir, this washing-gownd being no ways genteel."

"Yes. I won't detain you. Then, if you have anything to tell me, will you come and ask for me at the inn, where I shall be waiting?"

"Yes, sir; certainly, your honour." And Chatham departed.

Now, since Captain Oakley had arrived in Veorse, Una had not so much time as formerly at Doris's service; indeed, Doris was thrown upon her own resources to a most unusual extent. The old ladies, of course, observed this, and they did what they could to furnish companionship for their niece. Especially careful were they that Doris, after her illness, should get always a pleasant walk when the weather suited.

To-day it was aunt Eleanor who was Doris's companion. They did not go abroad till afternoon, and then they took the walk along the valley below the town, choosing it because it was sunny and sheltered. They were talking about L'Estrange, and Eleanor, though she altogether desired to speak comfortably on the subject, yet knew that there had been such very unsatisfactory accounts received by Mrs Stanshon, that she dared not speak so hopefully as her disposition prompted her to do.

"You know, my dear," said Eleanor, "everything may turn out to be quite right, or at any rate not so objectionable as it now seems; but, on the other hand, his behaviour may have been very bad,—men *do* behave very heartlessly sometimes,—and you ought to be prepared, in case of his not clearing himself, to act with spirit, and not let anybody suppose that you disturb yourself about so worthless a person."

"Yes, aunt Eleanor; but you see he is either innocent or guilty. In the one case, I should wrong him much if I were to banish him from my thoughts; in the other, I should never see him or even think of him again." The last words spoken in a very unsteady voice, but a firmer tone manifest when, after a little, she went on: "I don't see any way in which I can be prepared for both events."

"That is very true," answered Eleanor; "but you might, without any injustice, behave less like an engaged young lady. You know you are not really engaged. Now, why not go a little more into company? and why not be a little less cold and repellent to young men who desire to make themselves agreeable? Major l'Estrange would, in no case, have anything to complain of, and you would have some amusement to distract you from continually fretting about this misconduct that they lay to his charge."

When this was said they were but a short distance from Finch Lane, and they saw a young man come out of that lane and turn into the road which they were following, so as to meet them. As he was passing he at first appeared to treat them as utter strangers, then to be conscious of a sudden and hesitating recognition; finally, he stopped and pulled off his hat, saying—

"I cannot surely be mistaken as to both ladies. I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Clowance and Miss Adair. You are enjoying this fine day, I trust. It would be superfluous to ask how you are. That question answers itself."

"I really did not recognise you at first, Mr Salusbury," answered Eleanor. "You are on foot, like ourselves; I suppose preferring a stroll on this fresh morning to a ride."

"Partly so. But I have been riding to-day, and I am not now walking purely for pleasure. My grandfather has heard of something having been done to the ground near Maunder's Well, and thinks he ought to have been consulted first, as his property runs quite down to the well."

"But if you are going to Maunder's Well," said innocent Doris, "you are walking the wrong way. Maunder's Well is that way, quite half a mile on."

"Pardon me. A person at the head of that lane through which I have just come assured me that he knew the place very well, and that I was to turn this way."

"Did he say that you were to turn towards Veorse?"

"He did not say that; but he certainly said I was to turn to my right and keep straight on."

"And you have turned to your left."

"No, surely. Coming down the lane and turning to my right, I should be—no, I shouldn't—yes, why, of course—well, I really believe to the right would have been the other way."

Doris laughed as she thought of a saying of L'Estrange, who had told her that until a man has been drilled it takes him half an hour to determine which is his right and which his left.

"Really, it was stupid," said Chatham; "I don't wonder that you are amused, Miss Adair. Well, I must turn back. Very lucky that I met you, or I should have blundered on to heaven knows where. Hadn't the least idea that I was wrong. If you have not finished your walk, would you allow me to move by your side as far as our way may be the same?"

What Miss Clowance might have said, had the proposal been made to her, is a question which does not call for solution at present. But Miss Eleanor Clowance was of opinion that a walk was none the less pleasant for having a handsome, fashionable, agreeable young man for escort. This was not the wicked Sir Chesterfield, only his innocent grandson; and what possible harm could come of his walking a quarter of a mile by their side, or what was there improper in his so doing? Eleanor replied graciously to Mr Salusbury's request, and that gentleman with alacrity faced about, reiterating thanks for the great favour.

Mr Salusbury took care to make particular inquiries concerning the other members of the Clowance family, also about Oakley. He had only that day heard, he said, that Oakley was to have the honour and happiness of marrying into their family. Was the report correct? He was delighted to hear it. And Chatham did not fail to accomplish that which was, after the enjoyment of Doris's society, the chief object of his meeting them to-day. He sued for, and obtained, the privilege of being allowed to call sometimes at Miss Clowance's house.

Unfortunately for him, the ladies' walk did not extend so far as Maunder's Well; so, when they turned back, Chatham, to be consistent with the story which he had told them, had to bid them good day. Doris, in her walking dress, had not been to him one whit less attractive than Doris in the drawing-room. He saw and admired now her figure and carriage, and decided that, delighted as he had been at his first interview with her, he had then understood only half of her perfections. Chatham had been in love many times, but he thought that he had never before felt the passion as he felt it now. He fancied that he was encountering its romantic phase.

Meanwhile, as he made his way back by cross lanes to Veorse, the two ladies talked much about him on their way home, aunt Eleanor being the principal speaker. "Let his relations be what they may, there is no denying," said she, "that he is an extremely agreeable young man. And I am positive, Doris, that Felix said he is the elder of the two grandsons, so that he is pretty sure to inherit the title. He looks as if he ought to be a baronet or something distinguished."

"And he will inherit also," said Doris, "the property which ought to have come to our family. That is a somewhat bitter thought."

In her mind, as she said this, was of course the reflection how delightful it would have been to convey that property, or any portion of it, to the man to whom she might give her hand, especially if he were a soldier of fortune. But that was not the way in which her aunt's mind was speculating.

"His wife, you know, will have her share of it," answered Eleanor. "And it would be a curious thing if some of our line were to become possessed of it that way. There is an old prophecy that a lady of the house was to make away with the land. That has been fulfilled. There is another that a lady of the Deanes is to bring it back. I wonder whether the second part will prove as true as the first."

"You don't believe in those old sayings, aunt Eleanor, surely?"

"Well, no, my dear, I can hardly say that I believe in such a tradition as that, which may be a mere invention for anything I know; only these things are very curious sometimes. There is no doubt that half of the old saying has been strangely fulfilled in my own time. There is nothing impossible in the other coming true as well."

"A hundred years hence will save the credit of the prophecy, aunt Eleanor; and fulfilment at that time will matter but little to you or me."

"Well, yes, I daresay it's all nonsense, Doris."

Eleanor, though she could not very well have helped herself as to that matter, knew that her account of their *rencontre* with Mr Salusbury would be unfavourably received by Dorothy, and this thought made her a little anxious as they neared home. There are people in the world who would have kept such a matter secret, and exhorted the witness of it to secrecy, so as to escape a disagreeable discussion of the subject; but Miss Eleanor was not one of these. To conceal such a thing would have been a very un-Deane-like proceeding. No thought of concealment ever crossed her mind.

Una and Oakley were fortunately in the room with Miss Clowance when the two returned from their walk. "Do you know, Felix, your friend Mr Salusbury met us on the road, and turned and walked a little way with us," remarked Eleanor.

"Oh, indeed!" answered Oakley; "did you like him as well out of doors as in?"

"Have I heard you aright, Eleanor? What have you done?" asked Miss Clowance with severity. "Is it possible that you allowed Mr Chatham Salusbury to walk with you?"

"I don't know what I was to do, Dorothy, any more than I know how you could have acted otherwise than you did when he called here."

"In one's own house one is hardly a free agent in some matters of ceremony; but, out of doors, I would have sent the man packing."

"Well, dear, excuse me for saying I doubt if you would. He was extremely polite; the meeting was entirely accidental; and he went but a little way with us."

"Such meetings tend to create an acquaintance which is very undesirable. This is a most unfortunate circumstance."

"I don't know what we are to do except tell the young man peremptorily that we decline his acquaintance, and that we could not well do, as he is a friend of Felix."

"Hardly a friend," put in Oakley; "and don't let the thought of me influence you in a matter which evidently you

have at heart. If I were allowed to say anything on the subject, I should say that this grandson can hardly inherit the sins of his grandfather, and that he might get some quarter on his own account. He does not appear to be very evilly disposed."

"Appear, no!" answered Dorothy. "But appearances are but a poor guide to what a Salusbury may mean. What did our good old friend tell us herself?—that she would not trust one of her husband's kin in the smallest matter."

"The blood has been crossed since that," answered Oakley; "but now, to get on another tack, I have been telling my sister to-day that the doctors will pass me as fit for sea again soon, and I think of taking a cruise over to Portsmouth just to hear what they think."

Thereupon the conversation took quite another turn, and all were alike interested in it. It was not long, however, before Eleanor found an opportunity of being alone with Dorothy, and she did not fail to speak again of Mr Salusbury.

"You know, Dorothy," said she, "that Mr Salusbury must have some reason for being so polite to us; and it is my belief that he admires dear Doris."

"Heaven forbid!" was Miss Clowance's exclamation. "Why, fate seems never to tire of persecuting us!"

"Well, Dorothy, I don't think fate quite deserves all you say of it. We thought Felix was to us an infliction from an evil fate, but he hasn't turned out so."

"A Salusbury!" said Dorothy; "a descendant of that vile, horrid man!"

"He is that vile, horrid man's heir, at any rate, and will probably own dear Traseaden."

"Eleanor, could a Deane accept even Traseaden at the hands of one of that treacherous race?"

"No, not if he is treacherous. In that case he would not be likely to offer it in sincerity, and we should be weak to think of it. He may, of course, be utterly untrustworthy, but we don't know yet that he is so. He cannot be admiring Doris for anything but herself. If it were to turn out a match, justice would in some degree be done."

"Why, dear me, how you run on!" said Miss Clowance, slightly softened; "what can you be dreaming of, Eleanor? What has become of your young soldier, whose cause you espoused so warmly a little ago?"

"Ay, what has become of him? That is just what I was coming to. There seems reason to believe that he has not been behaving well, as you know. The child has a spirit of her own;

and if he should be proved guilty, will dismiss him, cost her what it may."

"Well, I hope she will."

"Nothing would help her to do so more than having another beau. Now, Doris will not be unjust to Major l'Estrange; of that I am sure. Mr Salusbury, with his nice manner and his fine prospects, will plead in vain if the soldier should be found true and loyal. But if he should *not*, then it might be in many ways convenient to have a not ineligible admirer ready to take his place."

"You speak as if the young Salusbury were standing here with his rent-roll in his hand, only begging to lay it at our niece's feet."

"Well, yes, I am looking a good deal forward. But what I want to show you is that, whether anything should come of it or not, it may not be an unwise thing to be, at the least, civil to this young man."

"There! I think it most probable that we have been wasting our time in talking over an affair which can have no significance whatever. Probably we may never see the young man again."

"He begged hard to be allowed to call. I didn't know how to say no. And I think it very possible that he may be knocking at the door some of these days. If you make up your mind that we must have nothing to say to him, the best way will be to give orders not to admit him."

"I will think," said Dorothy.

CHAPTER XXXI

A CLEVER AND FOND MOTHER.

Oakley was now at last so far a sound man, that the doctors told him a short time only need elapse before he could take to active service again, as far as they were concerned. And he knew well that, supposing the war to continue, there would be not the least hesitation about giving him a ship. "Therefore, my darling little Una," said he, after he had told how things stood with the doctors, "lest I should slip my cable a little too inconsiderately again (and I know that I justly lie open to suspicion, though everybody is too kind to suspect me), we will

make the splice, if you don't object, before there is any serious talk of work ; so that my little girl may not have even a ship for a rival, and I may give a good long honeymoon entirely to making her happy." Then would the lover describe the little plan which he had made for enjoyment. He would take Una to London,—that, of course,—and show her the sights of the capital. He would like to show her a dockyard and a large ship in commission, that she might know something about the service with which she would, by that time, have cast in her lot. If the little Aiguille were in harbour, he would like his little woman to go on board her, as also the craft which she had towed into port, in order that she might have some idea of what the little "affair" between the ships was. After that they would run away to some quiet part of the country, selecting their place of sojourn according to the season's complexion. Then there should be a little merry-making with loved friends at Veorse. "And by the time we are tired of gaiety, I daresay some steps will have been taken towards sending me afloat once more ; but we won't talk of that at present. Time enough to prepare for foul weather."

It was not a bit likely that happy little Una would object to the general plan of pleasure-making. She had her fancies, no doubt, and suggested some modifications of detail, which Oakley was only too delighted to hear and to agree to. So the great outline of the time of happiness was easily settled ; but, as most people know who have had to do with such blissful arrangements, the bustle and interest never flag for a moment until the whole festal programme is acted out. It is business in which everybody likes to join, and it affords pleasurable occupation to every soul that is concerned in it.

Now, this preoccupation of Oakley and of all the Clowance family was not without its effect on the designs and operations of Chatham Salusbury, Esquire, M.P. But for it, there would have been at this time either some *rapprochement* of the families, or else a very plain demonstration that accommodation was impossible. In either case, Chatham must have come to know something of antecedent relations between these houses, and of how his grandfather would regard his falling in love with a Deane. But there were good and sufficient reasons why Oakley could not now find time for improving his acquaintance with the family at Traseaden, and why it would be hardly kind to press the Clowance ladies just now to commence a visiting acquaintance with the Hall. As far, therefore, as regarded Clowances and Salusburies, things remained much as they had been for some time past, except as to this, that Mr Salusbury

fulfilled his intention of calling at Miss Clowance's house, and that he repeated the visit as often as he could make a colourable excuse for so doing. But, really, there was so much to think of, now that the wedding-day was, as it were, fixed, that his visits did not occupy anybody's thoughts for five minutes after they were paid. Anybody's mind in Veorse, that is. They were not so readily evanescent from Chatham's mind, it is certain. And, as we shall see, Chatham's surviving parent thought something about them too.

Indeed, every time that Chatham saw Doris, he went away more impressed with the superiority of her charms. Some new beauty or new grace was discovered at every visit. And the excitement about Una's wedding much favoured the changing of phase in Doris. It made her unconscious of the attention which she was herself attracting, and it created a series of delightful interests which were constantly changing. The young man saw that she cared little for him at present; but that, he thought, was only natural. She was very young, and had probably never felt a preference for any one. She was, moreover, full of this great event in the family, her aunt's wedding, and was not thinking of giving her own heart away. That might come later, if he should judiciously employ his present opportunities.

Did, then, Mrs Billet know nothing of Doris's romance, and could she tell her patron nothing on that score? Undoubtedly she knew about it, and could have told; but the young squire asked for such information as he wanted, and paid handsomely for it. A market would come ere long, as she thought, for all that there was to tell about L'Estrange. In the meantime, Mrs Billet would not force her confidence on any one.

So Chatham went on unsuspecting of a rival. So little was his mind disturbed by a spectre of that kind, that he felt quite easy about being able in due time to touch the young girl's affections, and gratified himself now with the pleasure of observing and admiring her. Every time a new fascination showed itself, he would think how it might be heightened by the opportunities or surroundings which wealth could procure, and how he might one day astonish the world of fashion by introducing to it a being who, to his thinking, was simply without a peer.

But if Chatham inhabited something of a fool's paradise, his mother was clear of the bliss of ignorance, and quite alive to the contrarieties of this work-a-day world. Mrs Billet, or some equally ingenuous and unselfish person, had supplied the whole history—the popular history, that is to say—of Doris's love

story, down to the account of the scandal which had been going about Veorse respecting her swain's infidelity. Indeed, Mrs Dunstan had learned the name of Doris's lover, and had been somewhat startled thereat.

Mrs Dunstan understood that Chatham's admirations had not hitherto been lasting ones, and she was anxious to know whether he was continuing constant in this case. If so, there was no use in the world in plaguing him with the idea of a competitor. That might be useful by-and-by, if at any time his fidelity should flag. Meanwhile, she thought she would draw from himself what the present state of his feelings was.

Already there was a change in the position which Mrs Dunstan occupied at Traseaden Hall. It had not been sudden; everything had moved with the utmost smoothness and regularity; but the widow was beginning to be a person of considerable influence there. To this day old Sir Chesterfield had never drawn from her the information which he had intended to draw concerning her past life or her views for the future; while he was conscious of having laid open to her much of his own sagacious and reticent mind. Little by little, and in the most accidental way, he was admitting to himself that his daughter-in-law was, at the least, his equal in the encounter of their wits. There were many points wherein he had at first regarded her with a condescending approval, as to which he now felt that she was as keen as he—nay, that he might even learn something from her. Yet the woman was so little prone to display, or to use her advantage, that the old man opened his eyes to her merits with pleasure rather than envy. "Egad, a blank'd clever woman," he would say; "though I'm not sure whether she knows it; all her best hits come out as if she didn't know that they were hits." This was quite the case, and the baronet, according to his instincts and maxims, saw that she was worth being made a friend and ally of.

"Will you let me ask you, my dear," said Sir Chesterfield, during a deal at whist, "why you put down your king of trumps to my lead, when you held a smaller card that would have done as well? I have no doubt that you had an excellent reason—you always have—for what you did; only it seemed to me that it was running a risk, though the cards put it all right at last."

"Oh, I am so much obliged to you for calling my attention to it, Sir Chesterfield. I fancied, you know, it would be better, but you probably saw that it was not so."

"Nay, I don't pretend to have seen any such thing. I remarked that the play was unusual, nothing else. We were

playing for the odd trick, you know, and indeed we made it; only I mean that when the game hangs on the trick, and the rubber on the game, one's play has to be rigidly exact."

"Certainly," replied the lady; "any departure from the purely safe game is, under such circumstances, unpardonable. I told you I should disappoint you sometimes."

"I really did not wish, my dear, did not think even, that you would have accepted my little remark as decisive of the question. I had some hope of provoking you to defend your play. Come, now, if our adversaries don't mind five minutes' detention, I should like to see what was the right play in that curious case. You, I know, held the king, a small trump, and a diamond; I had the ten,—best after your king,—a heart, and the knave of spades. There, that's it; and the other two players can, I doubt not, remember the remains of their hands. Now then, let us see. I led you the heart to trump. You put on your king; you led me the smaller trump, which was taken by my ten; and then my spade made a trick. All excellent as it happened. But suppose now you had taken the heart with your small trump; then your ace must have made; the last lead would have been with you, and—eh, what? No, we shouldn't have won that way. But then you might, after trumping with your small card, have led your diamond for me to take. No, by Jove! that would not have done, for the adversaries had a trump left, and would have trumped spades. You must have led your king next, and then my knave of spades would not have made. But still, let us try once more. Take it this way. Nay, there it is again. Egad, ma'am, I believe now that your way of playing was the only one that could have saved the rubber."

"So, after all," said the widow artlessly, "it was just as well that I chanced to put my king down."

"Chanced!" echoed the baronet. "I am sure there was no chance, although you are too modest to allow it. You saw every strand in the knot, and played accordingly. Almost anybody, except yourself, would have lost that game from hesitating to put down the larger card. I never, when at my best, could play like you. I doubt even if my brother Wolsey could, and he always calculated deeper than I did."

The old lady had, with the greatest thankfulness, allowed Mrs Dunstan to take on her shoulders the graver cares of house-keeping, and she found her daughter-in-law not only relieve her of trouble, but furnish amusement for the leisure which her assistance created. The thought of losing this valuable aid whenever Mrs Dunstan's visit might terminate, was so distaste-

ful to her, that, like a child, she would dismiss it from her mind as something which could happen only in the indefinite distance of futurity, when all the time her better sense told her that the daughter-in-law was only a visitor, and that she probably would soon leave Traseaden for livelier scenes.

The two young men had come to think very highly of their mother. They had not failed to see how steadily she rose in their grandfather's opinion, nor to understand, to some extent, how clever and far-seeing she was. She had exercised supreme tact in interfering with none of their favourite pursuits and pastimes; and she had many times come to their aid in difficulties which they did not suppose her to be even aware of. They had ceased to be at all afraid of her as a censor of any of their acts, and they looked to her rather as the good genius who was to make their undertakings prosper.

It was, therefore, with a feeling rather of satisfaction that Chatham one day heard her inquire whether he had forgotten all about the lovely Miss Adair, whom he had formerly praised so much. And he answered very candidly: "Forgotten her! No, indeed. I see her now and then. I still think her charming. But she is a difficult person to impress in any way. She is very young."

"Why should she be so difficult to impress? Young ladies who are in every way charming, have generally, as Shakespeare says, 'the gift to know it.' Possibly she only appears unimpressible."

"Appears!" echoed Chatham, almost with contempt, and then checked himself, and answered in a deferential tone. "Why, if you knew Miss Adair, you would see that she is simplicity itself. You could not suppose her to be acting a part, or practising the slightest coquetry."

"You are sure, Chatham?"

"As sure as I am of my existence. Why, she wouldn't—oh, dear no! I assure you she is not a bit that sort of girl."

"Girls with no real deceit in them have sometimes an instinctive proneness to dissemble a little where they know that they are admired."

"Mother, I firmly believe, nay, I am sure, that Miss Adair has not an idea that I admire her. She is too young to think of admiration yet, although I perfectly admit that some of them begin quite young enough. But that isn't her way. And besides, Captain Oakley's marriage is occupying the whole family, Miss Adair included. Did I tell you that Captain Oakley is going to be married?"

"No, you did not."

"He is going to marry shortly Miss Adair's aunt—a young aunt, of course. Very sweet girl, but not at all like Miss Adair. And the coming wedding seems so to interest the charming niece, that she has no thought about inspiring tender feelings herself."

"Well, of course, I who never saw her must not pretend to understand her better than you who know her. But I would not be discouraged if I were you. Young ladies who are hard-hearted for a long time, soften at last if they are discreetly wooed. Show your mettle, Chatham. Don't be scared by difficulty."

"I had hoped, mother, that by this time you and she might have become acquainted," said Chatham emboldened by his mother's encouragement. "But this marriage at present stands in the way of everything else. When that is over, perhaps you may not object."

"Oh no, indeed! If there be no reason which neither of us may yet know of, I must not be the person to desert you. We will see when the time comes."

Here, as Chatham thought, was one difficulty, or what might have been a difficulty, smoothed away. He had as good as secured his mother's support; for, as to the existence of any reason which might prevent his mother from visiting Doris and her kin, the thought was preposterous. So he felt greatly cheered. He had been drooping somewhat before the above short conversation took place.

"Poor fellow!" thought Mrs Dunstan to herself, as she coned the matter. "He doesn't want acumen; but men *are* so blind as to what concerns their own affections. Only to think, now, that he supposes this young lady to be too young to have a thought of love-making; and she secured an adorer, and is thought to have heard his vows of eternal constancy a year ago. Poor Chatham! I say again; but his case perhaps is not quite beyond a remedy."

The widow had pushed her inquiries to some purpose, and had ascertained such part of the history of Doris Adair as could be gathered from people without the family. She knew that Doris had been in love with a dashing young officer named L'Estrange, and that the said officer lay under suspicion at present of having in Spain made love to a lady, whose other admirer had challenged him to mortal combat; also that the recreant lover would certainly be dismissed unless he could rebut the charge made against his loyalty. She had reasons of her own for wishing Chatham to persist in his attentions to Miss Adair. But when she found that he did persist, and that he

was unconscious of a rival being in the field, she did not think it necessary or wise to disturb him with an account of the love story. He would learn that quite soon enough for his peace of mind.

She did, however, write at some length to correspondents of hers, Portuguese merchants, in London, concerning inquiries which they were to make about Major l'Estrange and his duel, in order that they might be ready to answer questions which she thought it likely that persons interested in Miss Adair's welfare would, sooner or later, address to them. Now, in addressing herself to this house, she showed very great discernment; for, by a curious coincidence, Captain Oakley was at that same time meditating a reference to this same Portuguese house. He had been moved to this by Una's regrets on Doris's account; for Una, in her own great happiness, could not be insensible to the cloud which had come over the prospects of her niece and companion.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SEAMAN-LIKE SPLICE—FABLES.

Incidentally it has been mentioned that preparations were fast being advanced for making Una the wife of Oakley, and the happiest of women. Those preparations were pressed forward with unintermitting zeal; and yet, with so many people working all to one and the same end, the time they took seemed very long. It is a truth, not to be proclaimed too obtrusively, that the number of the helpers, and contributors, and arbiters of custom and elegance, does not on such occasions conduce to despatch, but rather the contrary. Oakley did not know the whole of the negotiations that went on about ceremonials and family observances; but even he, with his limited information, was aware that a parcel—a large parcel—of old maids and matrons were at work, and if they were all even to propound their plans in full, the marriage could not take place until he should be in extreme old age.

By what title some of them put in their oars at all, or why any of them was allowed to interfere to an obstructive extent, cannot be explained satisfactorily. Yet certain it is, that authorities sprang up in all directions in the most sudden and embarrassing manner. People who certainly had not shown for

the last quarter of a century any interest in the house of Clowance came forward now with trumpery presents, or family relics, or remembrance of bygone festivities of the Deanes, and declared that this would never do, that it was never so done in the annals of Deane as was now intended, that they would go wild, and the old Deanes would turn in their graves, if such and such things were omitted.

It was a terrible, but yet a delightful pothor. Eleanor was, it is believed, in a great measure the cause of all these precedents, and fancies, and privileges being brought into question. She knew just enough about them herself to make them intensely interesting to her; but she believed in superior knowledge, as to certain points, on the part of her volunteer advisers, and so encouraged discussion and deranged plans. It was a great occasion for sentimental Eleanor; and it would have been a cruelty not to allow her in some measure to enjoy it, though to altogether satisfy her appetite was impracticable. Her brother Percival was not married in the Furze Range, but brought home his bride from a distance; and when Doris's mother was given away, there were older members of the family living who directed. So that this event, happening in Eleanor's pronounced autumn, seemed to her to contain and to represent all the weddings of which her early days had been defrauded. As Andromache saw in Hector the father, mother, and brethren whom she had lost, so Eleanor in this tardy marriage of Una believed to be contained the glories which envious fate had turned aside from her family ever since she herself was fifteen.

Dorothy was patient, exceedingly patient; but she had at last to extinguish many freaks and troublesome imaginations, and but for her well-gloved resolution a third generation of gossips might at this moment be debating knotty points in the approaching nuptials. But Dorothy was equal to the occasion, and so controlled matters that the wedding did take place before the bride and bridegroom had gathered many new weeks into their lives. It had been insisted by some advisers that the marriage of a Deane must of necessity take place in the church of that parish of which it had been intended to make Wolsey Salusbury rector, if he could have obtained ordination. It had been further demanded that the bride should be carried to church on a pillion, seated behind the gentleman who was to give her away. There were some who said that the newly-married couple must remain in Veorse for at least a week after they were man and wife; and who suggested ceremonies and revelries which, however appropriate they may have been considered in mediæval society, would scarcely have satisfied pro-

priety in 1814, and which one is altogether prohibited from mentioning at the present day.

The above were only proposals which had to be negatived after some time lost in discussion; they did not admit of being first done and then undone. But among the decorations, orders for entertainments, dresses of persons who were to attend the ceremony, and so on, the doings and undoings were endless. "Fix your day, my dear," said Dorothy to Una. "They will soon see then that there is no time for vacillation, and that everybody must go to work in earnest. Fix your day, and don't listen to even the suggestion of an alteration." Una decided, and was immovable. Then, as in the tale where the fire began to burn the stick, and the stick began to beat the dog, a healthy disposition set in at the upper end, and soon animated all parties.

When Una was dressed for church, and had her veil on, the last act, as one may say, of her maiden life was this. She drew Doris aside for a minute, and said to her: "Look at me, my dear. I have had trials, and disappointments, and a long delay; but I have never faltered in my trust, and now the happy end has come. Have faith."

In ten minutes after that they were in the church—Percival's church. He gave his sister away, and so got a brother parson to tie the knot. The latter was not assisted by any other ecclesiastic, and managed to get through his work without much exhaustion. Not two strong parsons the enormous solemnisation could accomplish—such parsons as live in these degenerate days.

It was thought in Veorse to be quite *the* wedding of that decade. Nearly the whole population turned out to see the ceremony, or at least the procession. Mr Solder, clean shaved and in his Sunday breeches, was in the street, though he had been disappointed of his furnishing order; and Georgy Hoskin finished off his beards in time to look out of a window at Una and say, "God bless thee, my dear;" but had not ventured to run home and make a change in his garments, lest, as he thought, he should be "shared out like them vargins what bought their ile retail, instead of keeping of a stock on hand." In short, it was a general turn-out.

How these quiet retiring people manage on occasion to excite so much attention, in a world remarkable for its subservience to the forward and the bold, is a question for the curious. Perhaps the affections may be taken by sap, or rather gallery, like fortresses; and the gentle beings, who seem never to have a design against them nor against anything else above-board, are

perpetually burrowing away like moles beneath the surface, and making their lodgments in the heart. In this case, the romance of the love story, of which nearly all Veorse were witnesses, may have had something to do with the excitement. Then Una had a fine day. The sun was favourable, like everybody else, and shone on the sweet little thing. And altogether, it is thought, details could not possibly have gone off better. Even those sticklers for custom who had been balked of their desires, admitted at the last that it had been a beautiful wedding, without drawback.

Those were not, in Veorse, days of wedding breakfasts. The bride and bridegroom drove away almost immediately after they were united. Una cried when she saw how everybody wept at losing her; but there was not much time for sentiment just then. So she was embraced and blessed by all of her own kin, and followed by the hearty cheers of an admiring multitude; while the fine old peal of eight bells kept up a clamour that was almost stunning, and seemed to confirm the idea that the town had gone out of its senses with joy.

"Well, Dorothy," said Eleanor, after the parting was over, "we cannot be too thankful that this has ended as it has. We must never despair again. Una is as happy as she can be. And Felix, now we know him, is a man in a thousand—quite another brother. Who could have foreseen this five or six years ago?"

"One of our troubles, we may certainly say, has been turned to a blessing," answered Miss Clowance.

"How well Felix looked, didn't he? He really is a fine, handsome man, and shows in his appearance the greatness of his character. I thought everything went off to perfection; didn't you? Everybody was there, and so well dressed. I don't think more regard could be shown for any family. It is a pity that that Miss Bold will persist in wearing those false ringlets. They don't become her in the least. I could see her great brazen face over a score of heads from where I stood. And it was very good of old Mr Stone to be present. I hardly thought the poor old man would have liked coming out so early."

Thus did Eleanor's mouth run on out of the fulness of her heart. But Miss Clowance, who remembered that they were no longer young, and that they were to have a party at night, was hardly disposed just now to go through with the discussion of the events of the morning. She thought they had better rest until afternoon, when Mrs Stanshon was coming to help them to put things in order for the evening's entertainment.

During this interval the house was so still as to induce melan-

choly feelings. Doris was alone. The excitement caused by the ceremony was subsiding; and she, having heartily rejoiced in Una's happiness, could not keep out a sense of desolation as she thought of her own prospects. Una had been a strong support to her, and now Una was gone. It was true she would return ere long, but not to be again to Doris as she had been before. Una's last words, "Have faith," were still ringing in Doris's ears. "Yes," thought Doris; "I cannot say but that her practice was quite up to her preaching, and everything has justified her conduct." But then immediately she began to reflect, as all of us are prone to do when we would encourage ourselves in patience and hope by thought of an example, that faith may not have been so difficult in Una's case. Whatever her trials may have been, she had never to complain that her lover deserted her for another. If what she had heard, and what so many things tended to confirm, should be proved, of what use would faith be? If he returned a hundred times with such a blot as that upon his fealty, he could never again be the same person to her. She must, she would, in such circumstances, dismiss him were he never so penitent. "I could forgive! Oh yes, I could forgive!" said Doris passionately; "but take back to my heart a person so stained—never! And yet I know that when I sentence him my heart will break."

Now Doris's anguish was not altogether without reason. There had been dropping together and accumulating scraps of evidence, all tending to a bad conclusion. Nobody could say exactly whence some of the rumours and surmises had come, but they found their way about, and all tended in the wrong direction. Doris thought it would be better to prepare for the worst, and here it was (although the poor girl didn't know it) that she departed entirely from the teaching of her aunt Una. Una never permitted a doubt to enter her breast. She could not, of course, have denied or ignored a crushing fact, had such been presented to her, as that her lover had died or had married another; but until some such terrible fact were established, she determined never to think it possible. Doris had not certainly thought L'Estrange capable of such a thing as had been laid to his charge; but there was the accusation not rebutted; and whose purpose could it have served to publish against him such an accusation as had afflicted her? Clearly nobody's. She must have heard it because it was true, not because any one desired to distress her by disagreeable accounts.

And so, while her two aunts reposed in preparation for the further exertion to be required of them that day, poor Doris distracted herself with doubts and fears and indignation. But

if she could not get repose to refresh her, she had youth on her side, and so was enabled to rally herself by the time when the duties of the afternoon were to begin. And there was one little ray of comfort which came to her after she had tormented herself for a long while. She remembered that Oakley had spoken of a certain quarter in London where he thought it possible that some credible information might be obtained. He would certainly go there and learn what people there had to tell.

The evening party went off as well as everything else connected with the marriage had gone. The hostesses acquitted themselves of their duties to perfection. It was a very large and a very happy gathering. The story hardly requires that a lengthened description of it should be given. There is, however, one circumstance which it may be right to mention. Mr Salusbury was one of the guests. Exactly how he managed to be bidden is not known; but it was a large party, and the occasion was one when to keep animosities green is not easy nor pleasant. He had been attentive and complimentary concerning Oakley's marriage; and, in compliance with his humble entreaty, had been permitted to make an offering to the happy couple. Possibly, too, he may have given a broad hint that he would like to be invited.

A few of the elderly guests, who treasured up old stories, rather stared to see a Salusbury in that assemblage, and one or two of them may have indulged in a shrug; but nobody was in the least offended by the heir of Traseaden and a member of Parliament being present. Mr Salusbury, for his part, was but little careful of what any person there, except one, might think about him; or, if he cared about the mind of any save that one, it was solely on that one's account—solely because some of them might, directly or indirectly, influence, for good or ill, the result of his admiration. Doris looked more beautiful than he had ever seen her, and many friends who had seen more of her than he had, said they had never seen her so charming or so animated. Is that fact incompatible with the account that was given of Doris's depression and trouble in the middle of the day? Not at all, it is submitted. Doris's youth scoffed at the merely physical effects of two agonising hours; and Doris's spirit was in arms against the suspicion of dejection at the wrong which, according to rumour, had been done to her. Indignation, it will be remembered, partly influenced her mood after the wedding; and that, and the defiant feeling to which she now lent herself, gave her the mettle which seems to have operated like Venus's zone.

Chatham, although he could not have derived much sense

from his sire, was yet not quite without some of the policy which distinguished his mother and his grandfather. He knew better than, in such circumstances, to evince his violent admiration, or to let his attentions be remarked, although he felt every word which he did not address to Miss Adair a perversion of the gift of speech, and every look which did not include her lovely form a subtraction from the possible joys of existence. But he endeavoured that every attention which he did permit himself to pay to her should be impressive, while it should be so delicate as not to shock that *naïveté* as to affairs of the heart, which Chatham still imagined to be a characteristic of his divinity. He was ignorant as yet that the eyes which shot about their gleams, all unconsciously as he thought, had already slain a man to his wounding and a young man to his hurt. Sly Chatham strove to make himself generally agreeable; and he especially directed his regards to Doris's aunts and Oakley's sister. Mrs Stanshon was in high spirits, and received his advances very affably; but aunt Dorothy, though she intended to be most courteous, did not half put the starch out of her manner, any more than she could chase the rigour from her old brocade. She couldn't let bygones be quite bygones. Chatham, with all his wishes to conciliate, felt that a chill came out of her which was gradually freezing him as he stood and prattled.

Not such was his fortune with aunt Eleanor. That spring in autumn, though she could at times and seasons pour out laments over Traseaden, and denunciations on those who had dispossessed her of it, yet did not see why these elegiacs were to obtrude themselves when an agreeable young man was anxious to distinguish her by his politeness. So, if Mr Salusbury's doings excited any observation at all, it was by inspiring Mr Millis, and one or two other satirists, with the joke that Miss Eleanor had executed a conquest. Eleanor was not such a fool as to think so—not she. But she had always liked little harmless passages of gallantry with the other sex. They had been congenial with her disposition in earlier days, and now they brought back for a few moments the feelings of her youth. Here was a young man, from some cause or other, anxious to devote himself to her. Why he made her his object, and what people might think of him, was his affair. For her part, she would avail herself of the opportunity. Chatham, on his side, perceived that Eleanor was the member of the Clowance family, of whom he most readily could make an ally.

To the guests generally Chatham behaved in an unpretending, agreeable manner. He led aunt Dorothy to supper, and he impressed on everybody the belief that he thoroughly en-

joyed the entertainment. The manner in which he proposed the health of the bride and bridegroom was very much approved, and indeed the golden opinions for which he was angling were plentifully accorded. Doris was too full of another subject to notice much such guarded attention as he thought proper to pay to her.

And so the wedding feast passed off.

Captain and Mrs Oakley enjoyed vastly their visit to London. To simple Una the wonders of the metropolis afforded endless delight, and Oakley experienced no less pleasure in showing to his wife some of these sights. They were not, however, so entirely wrapped up in themselves and their amusements but that they could think a little of the cares of others. On their third or fourth day in town, Oakley said that he had some business in the city, and he proposed to Una that they should drive thither and see some of the old regions, whose names, probably, she had often heard, but whose appearance she had little idea of. And so they drove away through Temple Bar, along Fleet Street, up Ludgate Hill, and past St Paul's (of which they did not wait to take more than a short view), and then plunged into the maze which was in that day the city of London. Through dark narrow streets and lanes, making marvellous and sudden turnings, finding the greatest difficulty in passing the huge waggons and drays, interrupted more than once by the passage of a four-horse stage-coach which made its way out of the court of one of the established coaching inns, they were at length rattled over the hard, uneven pavement up to the opening of a court, the portals of which seemed many centuries old, and heavy and dingy enough to have been the gates of a tomb.

Except the darkness, however, there was nothing funereal in the little court, but there was business as in a beehive, of which the little counting-houses and offices might represent the cells. Entering another arched doorway at the far end of the court, Oakley assisted Una up a narrow winding stair, entreating her to be careful, as it was so dark that they could do little more than feel their way. In time they reached a landing, with a Portuguese name printed large on the door. Oakley pulled a bell, and the door opened, of itself as it seemed, leaving the way clear into an ill-lighted room, full of desks with little green curtains round the upper parts of them. At one of these desks sat the gentleman whom Oakley desired to speak with. He received them very politely, wheeled out a wonderful old leather chair for the lady's accommodation, and then proceeded to attend to Oakley's business as well as his knowledge of

English (for he spoke the language very imperfectly) would permit him.

Oakley demanded of this gentleman whether he remembered the arrival in England last year of a lady of the name of Valdez. And the gentleman replied, "Valdez, oh yes," and referred to a little book on his desk to verify the date of the lady's arrival.

"Can you tell me where the lady now is?" asked Oakley.

"Oh no. I knows not."

"That is unfortunate. I came home in the same ship with Madame Valdez, and am anxious to get information concerning an event which occurred before she left Spain."

"Ah, yes. I don't know."

"You may have heard, possibly, that the lady was the cause of a duel between two officers in the Marquis of Wellington's army?"

"Yese, I hear."

"Do you know whether there is any foundation for the report?"

"No, I know not. Madame Valdez is aimable and hansom lady. It may be. I cannot tell."

"Thank you. I thought it just possible that you might know particulars; and I took the liberty of asking."

"Perhaps you should see the Marquis Salonga. The Marquis know of these things."

"Who is the Marquis? Can you give me his address?"

"The Marquis is one brave officer who fight with your English. He come from Portugal it is two months."

"I should like greatly to speak with the Marquis. Be so good as to give me his address."

"Address I have not. But the Marquis come here much often. You can leave note. You can give message."

"Does he speak English?"

"He speak not well English, but a little he speak."

"I can write him a note in English?"

"Oh, certainly. We shall here translate."

On a hasty consideration of the matter, Oakley thought it would be preferable to see the Marquis if possible. He accordingly left a note, asking him if he could conveniently appoint a meeting at the place of business. Then he and Una went to see the Tower, and spent a happy day, throughout which the need of this story does not require us to follow them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE HALL LOSES ITS GUIDING SPIRIT.

Two days after a most polite reply reached Oakley from the Marquis by the twopenny post, informing him that he would be in the City counting-house on a certain early day, and delighted to meet Oakley there. Oakley attended, and learned a great deal more than he wished to hear. The Marquis, to his great chagrin, informed him, after they had had a little preliminary conversation to lead up to the matter of the scandal, that he had been himself the officer who took the challenge to L'Estrange, and that he had been a witness of the duel. L'Estrange's conduct he represented to have been atrocious; and his arrogance and *hauteur*, when politely asked for an explanation, were, as he said, intolerably offensive. To Oakley's further inquiries the Marquis replied by detailing one or two secrets of the camp, which need not be here recited. Suffice it to say that they caused honest Oakley the greatest distress, by showing that L'Estrange had acted in a worse way, because with more deliberate disloyalty, than he had imagined to be possible.

Oakley was sufficiently a man of the world to try the Marquis on some points which might show how much he knew of the general condition of things in the army at the time of the duel. Unfortunately, the foreigner's answers were of such a tenor as to make Oakley admit with a sigh that his informant was quite qualified to speak of the doings in camp at that period. He had, he said, narrowly escaped Wellington's vengeance for being concerned in the affair of honour in question. Furthermore, he had had the misfortune to have a small quarrel afterwards on his own account, the effects of which were likely to have been so disagreeable to him, that, after the storm of San Sebastian, on which occasion his was one of those Portuguese battalions which crossed the Urumea to the assistance of our troops on the breach, he, being ill and also wounded, procured leave of absence on medical certificate, and came to England, so as to be out of the way until the memory of his offence might die out. There was universal expectation, so the Marquis said, of an early peace; and if that were made, the English general's displeasure would no longer be of importance to him.

There was not the least reason for doubting that the Marquis was as well-informed as he represented himself to be. Moreover, there was no supposable reason why he should wish to put

a complexion other than the true one upon the duel. These were the conclusions to which Oakley came after anxiously turning the evidence in his mind. He had promised to let his relatives at Veorse know as soon as possible of any testimony which he might be able to discover; and he sat down, with the first heaviness of heart which he had felt since his marriage, to inform Percival of what he had heard, and of what he thought of the testimony. "I have no doubt," he said, "that the Marquis was with the army, as he pretends to have been, because he is aware of facts and details which he could scarcely have become acquainted with unless he had been present; and his reasons for being now on leave seem perfectly fair themselves, and they are in accordance with what I know through Colonel Stanshon to have happened in the army. There remains now only one further measure to resort to, which is, that I should write to L'Estrange himself, telling him what has been said against him, and asking for his own version of the story. I am quite ready to do this, though the task would be disagreeable, if it be the wish of you all at Veorse that I should be the medium of communication."

There was very little difference of opinion concerning this last proposal among the Clowance family in council assembled. It was considered that the attitude which they had taken up, and had always maintained, towards Major L'Estrange did not admit of their taking him to task, or calling upon him to defend himself from aspersions on his character. By their express wish and decision he was a free man as regarded his attentions or affections, and Doris Adair was also quite free. If L'Estrange should ever seek to effect an engagement with the family, then would be the time to make such engagement conditional on his rendering a satisfactory explanation of, or refuting altogether, these accusations. As to Oakley writing to the young man, that proceeding was regarded by them very much as writing themselves, with this difference, that it would have a colourable look of being an act of independent friendship, while it would be so thinly veiled as to plainly show that the family was in effect seeking a renewal of the marriage negotiations. With L'Estrange directly, therefore, no communication could be held. Even Doris agreed in this view. Doris's pride rebelled against making any move until L'Estrange himself should have made some sign. "Had it been any other offence except the unpardonable one which was laid to his charge," thought Doris, "I could have wished that he should be made acquainted with what was said; but this is different. I would on no account call on him for his defence."

So in this state the matter was allowed to remain, Doris very suspicious that the story so corroborated must be true; very proud, very angry, and very miserable. Her aunts were thinking now that Mr Salusbury's attentions might be of service to her, whether he should be able to render himself acceptable or not; and even aunt Dorothy rather favoured his suit. Chatham did not himself believe that he was making progress. This belief, however, only heightened his passion. He admired Doris as much as, or more than, ever; and his chief thoughts were about the readiest method of obtaining her. Once, when fairly perplexed, he spoke to his mother, as she had before shown some sympathy with his case.

"I suppose," said he, "that Miss Adair's fortune can be little or nothing." He spoke as unconcernedly as he could, that he might ascertain whether or not his mother still retained her interest in the matter.

"I should imagine," answered Mrs Salusbury, "that opinion to be the true one; and I should calculate it at little rather than nothing."

"Had you thought of that when we spoke before on the subject?"

"Certainly."

"Because it would make a difference in the way in which my other relations might regard such an alliance."

"It might, certainly. I would not advise you to be in a very great hurry about it."

"But it may not quite rest with me to advance or stand still, as may be more convenient."

"You do not, I hope, meditate anything sudden?"

"I will be quite candid with you. I find Miss Adair so simple, and as yet so little intent upon love-making or anything of that kind, that I have been driven to think whether some surer means of obtaining her than a tedious courtship might not be available."

"You don't think of carrying her off in the melodramatic fashion?"

"No, I don't think of that; but I *have* been considering whether a formal proposal made to her friends might not force her attention to the state of my feelings."

"I do not at the present time counsel the course you propose. It might have effects more disastrous than you at present can fancy. Now, listen to me, Chatham; I also will speak with some candour. I quite remember that I encouraged your liking for Miss Adair; and I did not do so without considering how such a marriage might be contracted without detriment to the

family, and to yourself especially. It is possible that I myself may be able ere long to make you at least rich enough to dispense with fortune in your wife; and I may make my gift contingent upon your marrying Miss Adair, so as to win, in all probability, your grandfather's consent. But an arrangement of the kind would be at present premature, and you might spoil all by a too sudden declaration or proposal. Now, cannot you wait a little, and in the meantime continue your efforts to gain her favour? I don't indeed think that you risk anything by a moderate delay."

"You have said so much against decided action, and some of your remarks betokened such a generous intention, that I cannot refuse to follow your counsel for the present."

"Thank you; I am glad to hear you say so. You will, I am sure, not regret in the future that you allowed yourself to be guided by me. There are certain arrangements which have to be made before I could support you as I could wish in this matter. It is unnecessary to say what these arrangements are. They require a little time, and you will give me credit for considering them most important with regard to your pretensions to Miss Adair."

How glad Chatham felt that he had spoken frankly to his mother! She not only had shown him that she was still his ally, but she had shown him how she could materially advance his project. The delay which she had counselled would be more than compensated by the aid which she would render in the future. And though he felt that the postponement of decided action was for a somewhat indefinite time, yet his faith in his mother's ability was such that he did not dread a long tarrying. His desire seemed rationally more attainable than it had ever done. Already he knew enough of his mother to be aware that very few attempts to which she put her hand ever fell to the ground. He believed now that he would marry charming Doris. Perhaps the difficulty which he had experienced in rendering himself acceptable had something to do with the persistency and strength of his passion; but however that may be, it is certain that he was very seriously in love now.

Mrs Dunstan, on her part, knew very well that a formal advance by her son at the present time would surely be followed by a refusal. So she saw that a serious evil had been averted through Chatham having told his grief to her. She must try and keep her son in ignorance that there had ever been a pretender to Doris's hand, so that he might proceed calmly with his courtship; and meanwhile she must inform herself very thoroughly about this L'Estrange affair, and what was

hindering it, so that every effort might be made towards clearing the ground for her son. She had correspondents and counsellors in plenty, and she set her wits to work to contrive what had better be done, and how to do it.

It caused quite a little consternation in the household at Traseaden when Mrs Salusbury announced that she should leave the Hall for a short time. Whatever excitement the news of her first coming had caused, was greatly exceeded by that raised at the mention of her going.

"You are sure that you intend to return within a moderate time, my dear?" said the baronet to her timidly.

"Quite sure, if you desire my return, Sir Chesterfield," answered the lady. "I am going only on some unavoidable business, and shall be but too happy to find a welcome at Traseaden when that is concluded."

"I trust it is not a long business," her father-in-law answered. "You know I have but a slight tenure here now. To suit my desires, you must not only come again, but come soon." And his old eyes absolutely were suffused with moisture as he made the remark. To such pitiful weaknesses may men of the world be reduced if they linger on this scene after their strength of brain and body has deserted them!

To Lady Salusbury the announcement that her daughter-in-law was about to leave them was wellnigh heart-breaking. To go back to her duties and responsibilities, now that she was becoming somewhat disused to them, now that strength was failing, and her sight becoming every day weaker; to be laden with the whole weight of amusing Sir Chesterfield, after having had this little glimpse of repose, were things almost too calamitous to bear. It took a world of soothing talk, and of promises of speedy return from Mrs Salusbury, to in any way reassure the good lady. But there was some comfort in reflecting how carefully Mrs Dunstan had provided against the possible inconveniences of her absence; how she had instructed the servants, put together memoranda as to certain difficult points of probable occurrence, and put all accounts into a clear and simple form. What an entire mastery she seemed to have over all business of this description!

"My dear, I shall never have a tranquil day until I see your face again," said Lady Salusbury. "Do not stay away an hour longer than your business absolutely requires. You know I shall not be here long to trouble anybody. Put off absences for pleasure alone until after I am out of the way."

"Indeed, it is not pleasure which is taking me away now. It would be far more pleasant to remain where I am. You are

very good, Lady Salusbury, to express regret at my leaving, seeing that I was so very lately quite a stranger to you. I am sure that household matters will go on smoothly, and without requiring much attention from you personally."

"Well, I shall make the best of a bad business. You don't know how unhappy I am. Oh dear!"

Out of the Hall, as well as in it, people were bewailing the lady's departure; nothing but regrets. She was not herself much surprised at this; but it might fairly have puzzled on-lookers who knew the uncertainty, the almost dread, with which her coming to Traseaden had been expected.

The house seemed like a body without a soul on the day of her departure. The poor old people felt forsaken; there was a silent spell over the place; animation appeared suspended there.

In his daughter-in-law's case Sir Chesterfield, for the first time in his life, refrained from speculating in any great measure on the business of another person whom he perceived to have something of importance on hand. He was too much disturbed to occupy himself, as in times past, with divinations of what might be afoot, and with little plans for securing some benefit out of it, great or small, for himself. He only knew that his life was thrown off the pivot on which it had of late been turning easily, and that now there was disagreeable friction with every movement. "I got along comfortably enough before she came," thought the excellent old man. "She made things go more pleasantly for a time; but she has created a want which I didn't know before, and, by —, it was a misfortune that she turned up. I shall never be able to do without her now. I wonder when we may have her back."

Mrs Salusbury took her attendant away with her, which perhaps was unfortunate for any persons about the Hall who may have cherished a desire to know particulars concerning that lady's present way of life or her past history. Though she was a general favourite, yet she had in some breasts roused curiosity; and those who are by nature curious, like to trace the ways of those whom they esteem as well as of persons disagreeable to them. But there was nothing to be discovered in this instance.

She departed for the metropolis much about the time when Captain and Mrs Oakley were leaving London for their provincial excursion. The dulness which reigned at the Hall seemed to extend over Veorse. The excitement of the wedding had passed away. The excitement of welcoming back the bride and bridegroom was yet in the future. Chatham sought to enliven this interval by delicate and not too frequent attentions to the

Clowance party. And he soon hit upon a method which roused the interest of Doris Adair. He was enabled, through his parliamentary connection, to ascertain facts concerning the expected peace. News of these was always readily accepted by Doris, who was found to be quite a politician as regarded our foreign relations; so Chatham, until the time came when he was called upon to take his place in the great council of the nation, generally made his appearance at Miss Clowance's house with an item or two of information concerning the war, and Napoleon's last desperate efforts in the campaign in France. It was an odd taste, certainly, for a girl of an age when generally little affairs of the heart are found to be more attractive than campaigns or foreign politics, as Chatham thought; but the phases of female nature were inexhaustible, as he knew, and a man of the world would not waste his time in moralising on how such fancies could be, but would make his profit out of things as they were.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A HERO IN HOSPITAL—BLIGHTED HOPES.

Once again the reader is asked to look back into the recesses of the Pyrenees, and to imagine a not very spacious house, which was the principal edifice (the church excepted) in an insignificant village which lay somewhat to westward of the line beyond which, in the direction of France, Wellington's conquering army had now driven every French soldier. It was a fresh, delicious morning. Soft winds were playing about, and in default of leaves to toy with, were gently stirring the boughs of the mountain trees. The shadows of the waving branches sought, crossed, and avoided each other, forming endless diagrams, and sporting with much wantonness wherever a flat surface could be found for the exhibition of their antics; seeming to indicate that there was something about this morning which made serious occupation out of place, and rather invited and justified the delicious employment of doing nothing. The shadows had not been long at their diversions, for the sunbeams had but lately come on the scene. Yet this does not mean that it was very early morning; for it must be remembered that it took the sun some hours' climbing to overlook the peaks and ridges, and to send his beams down into the dells

which nestled beneath. Only a small patch of sky was visible from the village, and men looking at it from thence saw not much more than they would see from the bottom of a well. The field of vision was intensely blue; and about where the sun had recently entered it, the brightness was oppressive.

Peace, idleness, pleasure, these were certainly the suggestions of the landscape and the air. And yet but few days had passed since that scenery had been alive with clustering armies, had been full of sights and sounds of woe, and had seemed as if fiends had chosen it for diabolic exercises. But the traces of havoc did not deeply impress themselves on the mountain labyrinth. Upon the works of man the ruin wrought by man is long recognisable; but nature soon shakes off his stains and dents, and will laugh as in derision of his fiercest destructions.

Of a surety nature was smiling to-day; and her humour communicated itself more or less to the inhabitants of the building to which attention has been asked. Of all men, few could have needed a little lightening of the soul more than they. The house had been converted by the English to the uses of a hospital, and in it lay the wrecks of many stout fellows who would never wield weapon more, the torn bodies of others who might be afield again if nature could bring them alive through the agonies and perils of their present affliction, and the reviving frames of a few from whom the shadow of death was already receding—bold, sanguine hearts, who felt in the first reaction of their strength that their systems would triumph, and that again ere long the neighing steed and the shrill trump would rejoice their spirits.

Among the latter was an old acquaintance. Clad in a long gown, looking very weak and wan, but confident now that of his many wounds not one would prove mortal or eventually disabling, sate the Spalpeen in a verandah, drinking in the sweet refreshing air, reckoning how long it might be before he could be with the colours again, and hoping that the Emperor might sustain the war long enough to let him have another chance. Pat's little stretcher stood in a small room, wherein were also two other stretchers which accommodated wounded officers. Not many days ago the three had been altogether confined to this room. It was not to be wondered at, then, that Pat, permitted at length to move gently about, took advantage of the fair morning to lounge a little in the verandah. A good deal had happened to make Captain Perrin lift up his heart. He had heard from his Colonel that he (the Colonel) thought Perrin was now more than quits with him, and had a large credit in the account between them. He had been in-

formed, further, that the Marquis of Wellington had personally made inquiries concerning the officer who kept the pass, and had learned that it was the same who led the false attack on the breach at San Sebastian. "Damned glad to find that swimming isn't his only accomplishment; he ought to get noticed if he lives," the great man had said. The regiment jointly and severally had shown the greatest interest in his condition, and he had received from them marks of kindness and marks of honour.

Less than had happened to him would have raised his spirits, and he was now supremely confident that the fates would be kind, and give him another good chance.

"Sure, now, that'll be an orderly with letters, and I shall hear from Fred or some of the boys," muttered Pat to himself, as the footsteps of a horse broke the silence which was now so constant in that retreat. "They're always so cursedly tedious in bringing anything that's delivered in this heathenish place," he went on, "and the devil a way is there of making them smarter. It'll be an hour now before the contents of that bag are properly distributed. No; bedad, what's taken them? A new orderly, I suppose, who hasn't quite fallen into the lazy ways yet, that he's coming so quick along the corridor."

Pat couldn't turn his head as smartly as he did in days of yore, but with some pain and difficulty he got it round to observe who the new-comer might be, when his languid eyes lighted, not upon an orderly, but on his friend Major l'Estrange, who had come to see how he was doing. A sickly light came over the invalid's face on the recognition; but he could not rise except slowly and with pain; he could scarcely put out his hand to grasp that of L'Estrange.

"Well, Pat," said the latter, "I'm delighted to see you sitting up, if it's ever so much in sick man's fashion. The doctor says he hopes you'll be a sound man again yet. That's glorious, eh?"

"I'm ever so much better, Fred, but a poor devil still. All the same, I feel the sp'r't rising in me, and that's a good sign. Now get a chair and sit down by me, and tell me what's doing in camp."

L'Estrange soon procured a seat, and stationed himself by Perrin's side.

"Well, Pat," said he, "we have not been doing much except marching these last few days. All that are well are very well, but we've had a loss or two. Young Boyce is dead of his wounds, and Morton got killed in a small outpost affair a night or two since."

"Ah, poor Morton! and he's gone? A good fellow, Fred."

"A good fellow and a brave officer. But now let me tell you more cheerful news. We've got the Marquis's despatch reporting the battle on the hill, which the home papers have printed. He has spoken well of the regiment, at which all of us are highly delighted."

"Did he, now?"

"Indeed he did. I'm not agitating you, am I, Pat?"

"Sorrow a morsel. No, ye quite reflash me with it. Go on; tell me what he said."

"You are sure you can bear to listen to more?"

"As sure as I am that Cork's a city."

"Well, then, look here; I cut a column or two out of one of the papers, and brought it over just to show you the part of the despatch which concerns us."

"That's thoughtful of ye, Fred. Let's hear now."

"Well, here it is: '*Posted from the beginning in the thickest of the battle;*' well, never mind that for a moment. '*Poured in a steady and most effective fire.*' No, that's not what I want either. '*When the order to advance was given, showed no sign of fatigue, but sprang forward with the best*'—but no, that's not what I'm looking for. Stop, here it is. Listen to this: '*This most important pass was defended with extraordinary valour and conduct by Captain Perrin, whom I beg you to bring particularly to His Royal Highness's notice.*'"

"Did he say that?"

"Not the slightest doubt of it. Did you mark the words, Pat: '*with extraordinary valour and conduct?*' and then he goes on to say: '*I regret to add that this officer was dangerously wounded while in the performance of this duty, and that his hurts are reported to be many.*'"

"Ah, now. Think of that!"

L'Estrange looked at Perrin to see how he bore the intelligence. Pat's fingers trembled a little, but his eye was calm, and he seemed quite steady. So his friend went on.

"The papers have all had their say about the affair, and all to the same tune. One of them'll do to quote from, and look here what that one says:—'The hero of the day was beyond all doubt Captain Perrin, who was fiercely assailed by greatly superior numbers for more than an hour and a half; but who, in spite of heavy losses, and the receipt of severe wounds in his own person, kept the pass open up to the critical moment when it was required for the advance of our reinforcements. Let us trust that this gallant officer may long be spared to reap the honour due to his brilliant achievement, and to do further ser-

vice of the same sterling kind. We are, however, bound to admit that his condition, when the accounts left the field of battle, was not considered very hopeful.' Now, what do you think of that, my boy?"

"By the powers, I think it's a dale too favourable."

"Not a bit of it. Nobody thinks that. And everybody's delighted, I can tell you, that justice has been done to your behaviour."

"I don't doubt it. They're a true-hearted set of fellows. 'Twas very kind of them."

"Not a bit kinder than they're sure you deserve. But stay a bit, Pat; there's something more. Here's a gazette, and your promoted to Major. Besides that, the Marquis has ordered that you shall be attached to his personal staff when you return to duty."

"Is't me?"

"You, Pat; yourself and nobody else. I've brought copies of the general orders and the regimental orders for you to amuse yourself with after I leave you. So you see, my dear boy—hillo, Pat, what's this? I say, here somebody——"

Pat's lip had commenced quivering as L'Estrange last spoke to him. His cheek turned whiter than it had been before, though it was washed out enough from the first. A clammy moisture came over his forehead, and he lay back unconscious. L'Estrange, looking over the verandah rails, quickly summoned an orderly, and the orderly found a doctor, who repaired to Pat's side.

"I brought him some good news about himself," said L'Estrange, "which has been too much for him. I ought to have been more careful."

"I don't think there's much harm done," answered the doctor, who by this time had examined the Spalpeen. "Have you finished your pleasant story?"

"Yes, he knows it all."

"Then I think we'll soon have his eyes open again. Suppose we bring his bed out here into the air."

They lifted out Pat's bed and laid him on it. The doctor applied restoratives, which by that time had been brought, and L'Estrange had the satisfaction of seeing signs of consciousness. Perrin laughed a sort of hysterical laugh, and muttered, "Ah, go to the divil wid ye!"

"You had better leave him to me now," said the doctor. "I'll tell him I sent you away. My servant below will find you a glass of wine and a crust of bread. But Perrin must be quiet for an hour or two. He'll do well eventually."

"And can you give me a feed for my horse?"

"Certainly, if coarse forage will suit him. We've nothing very delicate here."

"Thank you. Then I'll take my departure;" and, nodding adieu to the man of physic, L'Estrange went to get the refreshment which had been offered for himself and his horse.

Before he left, the doctor, whom he had left with Perrin, came to him, and assured him that Pat was now in a quiet sleep, and that he was likely to be none the worse for the little swoon which he had suffered. L'Estrange had particularly asked that he might be allowed to convey the good news to his friend. Now that he was assured that Perrin would be no worse for the excitement, he felt certain that he would be better for having such pleasant thoughts to occupy his mind, and he rejoiced that he had been the medium of communication.

His friend's happiness having been thus very much promoted by his exertions, he thought, as he rode along, much about his own, the realisation of which every succeeding day seemed to render more probable. There could be no doubt that the end of the war was at hand; and it was his determination to hasten home the instant that peace should be notified, and to make his way into the Furze Range, where he would claim to renew his courtship. It was but a year since he had parted from Doris, yet what an eventful year it had been! He was then a subaltern; he was now a major. He had taken part in another general action of great moment, in a most remarkable siege, and in many minor actions of a very memorable campaign. He had gained more experience in those twelvemonths than many an officer has the opportunity of gaining in his whole career. Though his years were few, yet he felt as a veteran. He had been hardened into manhood almost before his time by rough work and stirring events. Not yet able to acquiesce in the decision of the council of three against his engagement, he nevertheless felt rejoiced that he had left sweet Doris entirely free, and that he could now go voluntarily to her, and tell her that he had never faltered in his allegiance. He pictured the meeting to himself. It was a delightful dream.

The ride back to camp was occupied altogether in enchanting speculations. The road ran through scenery as charming as can be conceived; through groves and woods on the mountains' sides, through the most picturesque of villages, over bridges and through fords, to which roaring cataracts or shrunken streams, dribbling along in huge torrent beds, like lads in their fathers' clothes, brought down the waters. On this bright day the whole scenes were rich with colour, and in

the clear ether, shadows intensified and sparkling lights dressed up the landscapes in holiday suits, exceeding gorgeous. Backgrounds were scarce along that sinuous way, but where they did appear, the forms of distant hills, reflecting the sunbeams, or accidentally darkened and dressed in more sober hues than the objects close to him, were fitted to relieve the eyes and wile away the mind. Behind all, the piled-up masses of snow, as they seemed, but really the heads of everlasting mountains, rising one over another until they were blended with the clouds, and until it was impossible to say where earth ended and where heaven began, gave a glimpse of the infinite. A few paces of his horse and a view like this was shut out again, and he rode among the distinct objects of the foreground which hemmed him in.

That the grand and gay scenery did not affect L'Estrange would be too much to say; but of the pleasant effect upon him he was but little conscious. His delightful scenes were *tableaux* formed on some inner chart, and beguiling the attention from the objects of the outward senses. L'Estrange saw interiors of English houses, warm hearths, happy faces, and one face, oh, so well remembered! one beautiful face, amid the pictures, beaming welcome, or listening to earnest words, or happy in ended trials, and a goal attained. He could have described all these phantasmagoria which had never had real existence; but of the beautiful real country, through which he had just passed, he could have given no account whatever when he came into camp, so profound had been his trance.

When he had handed his horse to the groom, and made his way to the interior of his marquee, he felt tired, and would have lain down for a little. To him, coming out of the sunshine into the shade of the canvas, his tent looked dark, and objects were not readily distinguishable. By the time, however, that he had refreshed himself with a drink of sour wine, and folded his cloak to lie on, things had become plainer, and he saw, lying on the top of his portmanteau, a letter which, on inspection, proved to be addressed to him. The writing of the superscription was not altogether unfamiliar, but he could not remember where he had seen it before.

He broke the seal, and unfolded a letter (envelopes were not in general use in those days) written in the same hand as the outside; but ere he could begin to read this, there dropped out a smaller letter, addressed in characters which he instantly recognised, and which set his heart throbbing. He dropped the larger letter from which the enclosure had fallen, and catching up the tiny billet (which was not sealed), opened it,

and began to devour its contents. As he did so, his eagerness rapidly subsided; and before he had read it through, he doubted whether he could be in his right mind. Then he sat listless, holding the billet in his hand, staring at the ticking of his tent, like one astonished.

The words which he had read were but few, and ran as follows:—

“To MAJOR L’ESTRANGE,—I told you that nothing but breach of faith should ever separate me from you. I can never pardon breach of faith. Your duel with the Portuguese officer is known to me, and also the events which led to it. It is my wish that I may never see you more, and I renounce you for ever. Possibly you may propose never to communicate with me again, and in that case I am taking now an unnecessary step. But I think it right, nevertheless, to apprise you of my unalterable determination. DORIS.”

When the young man had collected his thoughts, he read the cruel letter again and again. What it told was only too plain and too unmitigated. He had forgotten all about the outside despatch, until he, in writhing about, touched it with his foot, and made it crackle. Then, really hardly caring from whom it might be, or what might be its contents, he took it up, and began to read it in the calm of despair:—

“DEAR L’ESTRANGE,—I am truly sorry to have to transmit to you the enclosed note. To explain my intervention in the matter, I must tell you that I have lately been married to Miss Una Clowance, now Mrs Felix Oakley. Believe that I have done everything I could in the hope to place your conduct in a better light than that in which it appears to my new relatives; but I have been disappointed. I have personally conferred with the Marquis who was second to your antagonist; his statement leaves no doubt of what were the relations between you and Madame Valdez.

“There was not, as I understand, a distinct engagement between yourself and Miss Adair. Her family, therefore, do not make any complaint concerning the course which you have thought it proper to pursue. Only Miss Adair, whom I may now call my niece, thinks it requisite to acquaint you with her decision.

“The unhappy scandal concerning you has caused me great pain. I esteemed and admired you. I did not judge you to be capable of that which I have now been forced to believe.

"As I am at present cruising about, will you, if you should desire to communicate with me, address to the care of Messrs Pedro Euriquez and Co., who will be instructed as to where I may anchor from time to time. Should you be able to refute the story which has been told to your disadvantage, none would rejoice more than—Your former friend,

"FELIX OAKLEY."

Where were his dreams now—his hopes of fruition, of halcyon days? He felt as if hurled into the depths of despair, as if life were no longer worth retaining, as if his service and his advancement, on which he had this morning thought with so much pride, were but mockeries. It is easy to imagine the state of bitter disappointment into which a person like L'Estrange would fall, and it is not pleasant to describe it. One may do well, therefore, in passing from the painful contemplation for a while.

Colonel Stanshon was absent on some detached duty, or, probably, long ere this he and L'Estrange would have been drawn together again, and the latter would have had a friend to whom he could have confided his troubles, and through whom he might have completely disabused Oakley's mind. Most unfortunately, the cause of the coolness between the two soldiers was the very matter which it was now L'Estrange's desire to put in the proper light. If he had taken his friend into his confidence as to Madame Valdez and his duel, he would already have been provided with a witness and an advocate, who could not have failed to remove the ill impression from Oakley's mind. But his evil fate seemed to have purposely perplexed the matter. This adventure, concerning which he had shown himself exceptionally intractable, was just the one in which, as it proved, his happiness was mainly concerned. He might have "got on the high horse," as it is called, might have exhibited caprice and tetchiness in a hundred instances, without harm to himself further than the repentance and shamefacedness which he might afterwards have felt for behaving with petulance. He had avoided it in these hundred, and yet had yielded to it in the one from whence were to grow the greatest griefs that he had ever known. Every man's experience must tell him that complications frequently arise in this way; and yet how many of us scoff at the idea of our actions being regulated by influences which warp our wills!

A very wrong impression will, in this narrative, have been given of L'Estrange's character, if any reader should imagine

him as having given way to irrational despair after he became aware of his great disappointment. For a time, it is true, he could see only the blackness of misery before him, and he was oppressed with the sense of the truth of his affliction, and cared not to consider the way in which it might have come about, nay, his mind absolutely refused to occupy itself with particulars. But by-and-by came, of necessity, a healthier state of mind, and he began to examine the phrases of these mysterious letters. As he did so, he could scarcely bring himself to believe that the gentle Doris could or would have written to him in such terms unless in reply to an appeal made by him, or on his behalf. Its language, so cold and stern, was such as she would hardly have used after his last plea had failed; it was most unlike a voluntary composition of hers. But, of course, he did not know the circumstances in which she had written.

Again, he could hardly imagine Oakley, good and kind fellow as he was, having anything to do with the business, unless it had been to write and caution him that his character was being hardly dealt with, and to implore him to defend himself. But here again he felt that he had by reticence possibly caused Oakley to judge him unfairly. He had never confessed to the sailor his love of Doris, and he had said to him only so much regarding Madame Valdez as might now lead him to suspect that a great deal more, and perhaps the most important part of the story, had remained untold. How strange that such complications should since have arisen! Who could ever have thought of such a thing as Oakley becoming Doris's uncle, or of Madame Valdez's escapade becoming known in the Furze Range?

He might see what appeared to him difficulties and inconsistencies in the letters; but he could by no means alter the truth that such letters had been written, and he must deal with them as they were. Oakley had distinctly said that it would gratify him to receive from L'Estrange a denial or satisfactory explanation of the conduct imputed to him. The obvious course was to pen and send to Oakley a complete account of all that took place, with such confirmatory reasoning as he could use. And, not long after he was shocked by the receipt of the letters, he sat down and wrote to Oakley in terms which, as he thought, must be convincing, if any words could be so. And he despatched his letter, addressed, as directed, to the Portuguese house, by the first opportunity that offered after it was written.

While he was writing and commenting upon the departure, both by Miss Adair and by Oakley, from the style of diction and the sentiments which he would have expected, a horrible

thought crossed his mind. If some rival should have succeeded in supplanting him in Miss Adair's affections, everything would be accounted for. He was angry with himself, even now, for entertaining a doubt of Doris's constancy; but there were maddening suspicions whichever way he looked, and there must be some unexpected reason for what had occurred.

L'Estrange waited many weeks for an answer from Oakley, but received none. They were to Europe at large most eventful weeks, inasmuch as they saw the French Empire reduced to the mere shadow of itself, and echoed with the hopes expressed on all sides that there would be peace immediately. But the unhappy young man had ceased to think of public affairs; to him the passage of time was of interest only so far as it might bring further intelligence to him, and he was continually disappointed.

At length he resolved upon taking a step to which he was but little inclined, but which was now the only resource which he could think on for obtaining relief to his suspense. He wrote a letter to Mr Millis, not telling of his woes, but so written as to bring an answer containing the Veorse gossip. But it so happened that, by the time this letter reached Veorse, Mr Millis had betaken himself to London, and, as Justice Shallow had done before him, lay at Clement's Inn. The letter was, however, duly forwarded,—that is to say, it reached Mr Millis in town about a week after it had been received in Veorse. The little lawyer was proud and delighted at receiving it, and sat down to answer it forthwith. Had he been in Veorse, he would certainly have announced the receipt of it to all the world; have let Oakley know that L'Estrange was disappointed at his silence, and would perhaps have disseminated other intelligence calculated to bring about a clearing up of mysteries. But, being in London, Mr Millis could only give at second hand such of the Veorse gossip as he knew. There was, unfortunately, one paragraph in his answer which wellnigh confirmed L'Estrange in his despair, and made him careless of further information. It was this—

"By the way, the coming peace will afford you an opportunity of looking after your interests in Veorse, if you still have any there. According to the best accounts, there is a young gentleman from Traseaden Hall who is very persistent in attentions at Miss Clowance's house. He is an M.P., and the heir to the baronetcy. I don't think he can be attracted by either of the old ladies. Do you? Nevertheless, something or *somebody* attracts him, and he is described to me as being very seriously in love. Captain Oakley is understood to be

beside himself with happiness since his marriage. Perhaps that is the reason why he has not found time to write to you."

This gave colour to, if it did not confirm, his very worst suspicions.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE PEACE OF 1814.

Captain Oakley could hardly say whether the near approach of peace was gratifying to him or the contrary. It made it probable that he would have to wait some time before he could be appointed to a ship, which was rather disappointing. On the other hand, he would enjoy a further indefinite period of leisure, which he might devote to his dear little Una. Una, for her part, had no mixed feeling as regarded public affairs. She rejoiced in the coming peace with all her heart. So, it is believed, did all her relatives. Mrs Stanshon was wild with joy, and forbade Oakley ever to mention, in her presence, the possibility of the peace being matter of regret to anybody. Indeed, the joy was very general; but yet in one quarter where the peace had once been so ardently desired, it was now matter of indifference.

Poor Doris had to listen to congratulations and expressions of thankfulness on all sides, and to feel at the same time that this peace, which she had once so ardently longed for, would bring her probably only a redoubling of affliction. It would place beyond a doubt that misfortune of which she had as yet only the gravest suspicion. It was some comfort to Doris when Una, all smiles and brightness, and looking only eighteen, came back from her wedding excursion. Una was not a person to overpower listeners with accounts of all the delightful things which she had seen, but, nevertheless, her mind was very full of them, and when any one wished her to talk she had plenty to say concerning them. Doris, poor girl, did not enter very cordially into the narration of all the wonders which Una had to describe, but she felt it so comforting to be by Una's side that she feigned a desire to hear the descriptions, and was much with Mrs Oakley in the house which her husband had taken for a temporary home. It was delicious to hear the little bride talking about dockyards and ships and the great waters, like

one of the initiated speaking to outsiders. Doris would, at another time, have enjoyed it as much as any, but now her grief and her fear left her no disposition to be amused.

"And if there should be peace," Doris said one day, "Captain Oakley will not have to go to sea at all. How delightful for you!"

"Yes, he will have to go to sea, Doris, but not so soon. There are always some ships in commission, even in time of peace, and his turn is sure to come. There will be only the dangers of the sea then, which are quite enough. I mean there will be no more fighting."

"No," echoed Doris, with a sigh, "there will be no more fighting. I used to think that announcement would be the most blessed that I could hear."

"It is still a most blessed announcement. You mean that it does not bring you the joy which once you thought it would."

"Yes."

"Well, we shall see. You could have had no comfort *without* peace."

"No."

"My dear, I grant you that your case looks bad. I have been discouraged since my husband made those inquiries and was so fully answered—the answers appearing so unfavourable. But there are two points against which there has been no proof,—and these are, that Major l'Estrange may wish and endeavour to renew his friendly relations with us, and that he may have something to tell which may place everything in another light."

"Does it look at all as if those things could happen?"

"They may certainly happen, Doris. It is astonishing how an unthought-of turn will sometimes untie a knot that has seemed impracticable. When people are so bad in one respect as he is reported to have been, you generally find that they have other faults. Now, up to the time of this story of the duel getting about, everything you heard of his conduct was creditable. I don't say that your grounds of hope are strong, but there are reasons why you ought not to despair."

"Oh, I like so to talk to you, Una! You can comfort me when no one else can!"

"I always find it better to hold fast by everything favourable, and not to give too ready entertainment to fears and bad suspicions."

Chatham Salusbury did not fail to visit the bride and bridegroom after their return. His mother, as he informed them, was unavoidably absent from Traseaden; but she was expected back shortly, and on her return he hoped there would be friendly

relations between the families. Chatham kept his footing too in Miss Clowance's house, and continued to be very attentive there.

In that house the satisfaction occasioned by Una's marriage increased as the weeks rolled on. Oakley showed himself to be so kind and liberal in every way, that the feeling was that not Una only, but every member of the family had gained a most valuable relation. They began to understand what Oakley's credit at the Admiralty meant, and that he was a person of some fame and importance. The best families in the Furze Range hastened to offer their acquaintance and congratulations to Una, and the old ladies, if they desired to renew their ancient relations with the county families, had full opportunity of doing so.

Sir Chesterfield Salusbury continued very much unsettled while his daughter-in-law remained absent. He would undertake no social duty, make no arrangement, and exhibit no sort of energy. Thus Mrs Dunstan's absence caused a complete stagnation at the Hall. But the old gentleman was at last gladdened by the lady's return, which was an event of the greatest importance at Traseaden.

It did not excite so much interest in the Furze Range generally as it might have done, because it was coincident with the arrival of the news of Napoleon's abdication and of the conclusion of peace. The great outburst of joy which followed upon the cessation of hostilities was such that people would scarce notice incidents which affected only a few persons. Every one was simply a patriot. There had come a relaxation of the great strain which for so many years had taxed our energies to the uttermost, and we felt that we had struggled honourably and not in vain.

With the war closes this period of the history of Traseaden Hall.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

HOW A MAN OF THE WORLD CAN DIE.

THERE is peace again, and this time a lasting peace. It is the autumn of 1815. The hundred days are over; Waterloo has been fought; Napoleon has fallen, never to rise again. The country is adapting itself to the changed condition; but so much have its calculations and arrangements been based upon continued war, that it finds the return to much-desired peace irksome and embarrassing. Intolerable as had been the incubus of the war, the sudden termination of it caused an unpleasant shock. Business lost its briskness; employment failed to hundreds; the withdrawal of excitement made life comparatively tame. All would come right again after a little, but the dawn of peace, as most people were experiencing, was not wholly delightful.

There were some, however, who at once entered upon full enjoyment of the altered times. Those who for long had lived in a fever of anxiety on account of dear ones exposed to the risks on land and sea, speedily recognised the relief which the peace had brought with it; if the land could not in a moment settle to its rest, their hearts required no tempering of time to make them rejoice. No more turning of bulletins with trembling fingers; no more dread of battles, wearing toils, and cruel privations. This assuagement of long-borne misery, immediate and great, effaced every consciousness of alloy.

Many of the persons whose history has been occupying our pages were thankful that there was peace once more, cost what it might. Oakley's career, as many of his admirers were fond of saying, was cruelly cut short. No more opportunity of dis-

tion, no chance of prize-money, not even the certainty of employment. But fame, wealth, and continuous occupation were but small matters in Una's estimation, compared with the cessation of perils and of long absences. All the house of Clowance, which had now adopted Oakley as a cherished member, shared the wife's feelings, and would not for any consideration have had him longer exposed to danger. He had been appointed to the command of a frigate three or four months after his marriage, and when the Emperor broke out from Elba, it looked as if Oakley were destined again to take his part in many "moving accidents." But then came the complete suppression of the disturbance, and he was employed for the present on some coasting duty, with the caution that it was in contemplation to pay off many of the ships in commission, and he might possibly have to go to half pay.

Doris Adair was heard to speak of L'Estrange within her family very seldom; without it, never. Those who knew her best were of opinion that she was, for the present, resolved in her heart never to marry at all. L'Estrange had made no sign these two years, and if he had, would scarcely have been forgiven, after the disloyalty which had been all but proved against him; but though Doris had strength of will to shut him out from her heart, she had not found the said heart sufficiently accommodating to admit a successor to his place. Time must be allowed her, as her friends said. It was not to her discredit, but the contrary, that she could not all at once forget. Still her friends hoped that she would come round. Constancy to the undeserving was virtue carried to excess. Without hasty fickleness, she might be amenable to the action of time and reason.

Indeed, Doris's relations now saw that L'Estrange might some day be replaced in her affections by a more eligible person, and they, for their part, were willing to wait patiently until a favourable turn in her feelings might show itself. But they were not the only persons claiming consideration. Chatham Salusbury, as we saw before, was persuaded to a short patience by his mother, but would probably have tried his fortune, or, as one might say in his case, rushed upon his fate, and been dismissed, if fate herself had not stepped in and averted his action. At the time when Mrs Salusbury could not count upon restraining much longer the ardour of her eldest son, both she and he were compelled to attend to other matters, which for a time forbade all movements with regard to his marriage, if they did not prevent his thinking of the happy estate of matrimony.

Poor Lady Salusbury never, in effect, recovered from the shock which she experienced when her daughter-in-law temporarily left Traseaden Hall. She survived, it is true, to welcome the widow back again; but it was evident that she was no longer the same person that she had been. She had not been overwhelmed by her household cares—far from that; for Mrs Dunstan had left the whole machinery in such order that the wheels worked by themselves, so to speak; at any rate, they answered to the lightest touches in the way of direction. It was inability to reach her aims in another respect which distressed her ladyship to such an extent as to seriously affect her nervous system and to undermine her health. She had found herself wholly unable to compensate Sir Chesterfield for the loss of the younger lady. Her services and attentions, which had been accepted while there was no experience of anything more efficient, were found to be unavailing now that the baronet's taste had been gratified by a higher flavour. In vain did she seek now to console or to amuse him. He would not be comforted; and he rejected, though not rudely, her attempts at solacing his distress. But however inoffensive the old gentleman's discontent might be, it in effect broke the heart of his faithful helpmate. The old lady, finding that she had lost all power to soothe or to entertain, imagined that she must return to the neglected, unworthy position of old days, and sickened at the thought.

When an idea of this kind takes possession of an old and feeble mind, residing in a body not over firm or over fresh, the consequences may be serious. In this case they were so. Lady Salusbury's sorrows returned upon her with overwhelming force, and her strength gave way noticeably. She talked with a whine, which gave her hearers to understand that she was sick of this world's crosses, and desisted from contention with them. She took little interest in the events which passed, and spoke directly, or by allusion, of the rest to which she was tending. She received back Mrs Dunstan, not as likely to restore her to her former condition, or in any way to reverse the decree which had gone forth against her, but rather as a friend who would sympathise in her distresses, smooth her pillow, and close her eyes.

As in her illness of former days, Lady Salusbury showed considerable tenacity of life. Weak, ill, and miserable, she was a long time dying. But she dropped asleep at last.

Sir Chesterfield manifested considerable feeling during her illness and at her death. Those who knew nothing of their early history (that is to say, the greater part of their establish-

ment) had reason to suppose that they had ever been a most attached couple; that they had borne together the early rubs and sorrows of married life; had grown old in undiminished affection, and had come down the hill hand-in-hand, the severance which had just occurred being the first rupture of their union—at least, the wails and regrets of the old baronet led to such an inference.

Mr Salusbury could not, of course, take any measure with a view to matrimony until a decent interval had been allowed to elapse after his grandmother's death. But he recommenced his visits at Miss Clowance's, and his attentions to Doris Adair, a short time after the funeral. And he began to make to Doris, both in public and private, speeches such as left very little doubt about the tenor of an important speech, to be made hereafter, to which they were intended to lead up.

Doris was greatly exercised. She was aware by this time that all her relations looked forward with approbation and pleasure to the day when at her feet would be laid the heart and goods of the owner of Traseaden. They all looked at this as a providential appointment to bring to naught the wickedness of old Sir Chesterfield, and to cause the estate to descend yet in the right line. And Doris knew how they felt, and how bitterly disappointed these dear and kind relatives would be, if at last she should wilfully reject that on which they had so set their hearts. She was indignant, and in a high degree resentful, against L'Estrange, for whom she sought not to make the smallest excuse; rather, she condemned him, and would not, if he had been never so penitent, have accorded him any grace. But when it came to putting another into the place in her heart which had once been his, that did not seem possible. Now this may look a little unreasonable in Miss Adair. She herself had to herself distinctly declared the place vacant. There was an opportunity about to be presented to her of advantageously filling the void. Yet the thought of doing so was intolerable. This inconsistency is best explained by the supposition that Doris and her heart did not quite understand each other. Doris was angry, peremptory, and, as she thought, immovable; but the heart, without her knowledge or approval, must still by some fine thread have been hanging on to the recreant lover, for it rose up resolutely against the irrevocable act of replacing him.

Nobody pressed Doris in words, and yet she was conscious of a mighty pressure to accept Mr Salusbury. Upon her decision hung the hopes of them to whom she owed everything. There was no fair objection to be made to the match. She had said

more than once that she had discarded L'Estrange. On what grounds, then, could she refuse to listen to Salusbury? And yet she meant to refuse; she felt that she could not bring herself to accept Salusbury or anybody else. Her own solution of her case was, that she hated and despised the other sex altogether; that the sin of one had made every human male odious to her; that she was devoted to celibacy. But this solution brought misery with it, because of the many loving hearts which must be disappointed cruelly by reason of it. And the time was with remorseless strides approaching when she must inflict the blow.

Mrs Dunstan Salusbury had not been insincere in saying that her absence from Traseaden some weeks since had been occasioned by business purely. Yet if the business had been simulated, she might have considered that her absence was well compensated by the increased influence which she exercised on the old baronet after her return. He had felt himself so desolate and helpless without her, that on her return he resigned himself almost wholly into her hands. He didn't know how weak years were making him. He fondly fancied that his brain was as keen and his will as strong as ever; but he was, in truth, to a cunning hand, only dough to be kneaded, or wax to be moulded. He might have resisted possibly an open attempt to govern him; but Mrs Dunstan was far too clever to make any open attempt, when she might rule absolutely, to her heart's content, by keeping her sceptre out of sight.

Now it came about, some weeks after Lady Salusbury's death, that Chatham, grown more and more impatient through the check which his grandmother's illness and death had caused to his love proceedings, told his mother that he must now take some means of ascertaining whether he might hope to win Doris. His mother, as was very frequently the case, seemed to have anticipated, and to have prepared for, his announcement.

"My advice to you would still be, wait a little until you shall be your own master, Chatham."

"I really cannot wait," Chatham answered; "the uncertainty is wearing me to nothing. I must go soon again to town, as the minister expects some opposition; and I could not go without first ascertaining my fate. Mother, I have quite decided, I *must* marry Miss Adair, and I must secure her at once."

"I say again, Chatham, that it would be wiser to delay; but as there seems no probability of your waiting, I have endeavoured to gain your grandfather's favourable regard of your suit. Already he is so far won to your cause, that he does not de-

cidedly forbid; and probably with management he may be brought to consent."

"This is really good news," answered Chatham. "I thank you heartily, mother. I hope, nevertheless, that the gaining of my grandfather's consent may not be a tedious process."

"He will speak to you on the subject to-day, after dinner. Wolsey will be absent, and I shall leave you and Sir Chesterfield to a *tête-à-tête*. Mind not to be too impetuous or positive, but to let everything be said and done as if in consequence of his suggestions and wishes."

Chatham promised self-restraint and prudence. He refrained from going that day to see his fair one, lest fresh draughts of love should intoxicate him and derange the balance of his wits. The old baronet was gay and talkative beyond his wont during dinner; and this was taken as indication that he was about to approach the subject which was nearest Chatham's heart in, at the least, a benevolently neutral spirit. His stories were dreadfully threadbare now, but he told some, and seemed to think he was opening a new and original budget. He made, moreover, allusions to matrimony, and to the descent of his title and estates, which augured well for the discussion that was coming, and put Chatham's mind somewhat at ease. As the latter followed his mother to the door, she made a sign of caution. He returned to his seat collected, and with his tongue well in hand.

"I have ordered up some of the 1807 claret," said Sir Chesterfield. "I intend to sit a little while here with you, my boy, and I can't drink so many glasses of port without clouding my brain as I could forty years ago. Bordeaux is better to talk upon. We will push the port to and fro once or twice, and then attack the 1807, eh?"

"That will quite suit me, sir," answered Chatham. "I am glad that you propose to chat a little, because I want to draw your attention to the position of the minister. They have made a strong whip for the third of next month, and are said to be expecting to be rather hard run on the sugar question. I thought it might be a good opportunity to ask for some recognition of the support which I have invariably given to Government."

"Ah, perhaps so. Yes, that is a point never to be lost sight of. But I was about to touch on another matter, which is, I believe, a not altogether unimportant one. Is the claret on the table, Johnstone? Ay, that will do. Now leave us."

Johnstone, the butler, having placed the claret-jug on the table and supplied the necessary glasses, helped each gentleman once more to port, and then withdrew.

"No wine," said Sir Chesterfield, "has ever been discovered—I don't suppose any ever will be discovered—to take the place of port. Many that are agreeable to the palate, but none supporting like port. Port must be the basis. I must say I consider port essential in youth, in manhood, and in old age. How's this? There's, there's—— Chatham, my boy, I can't lift my glass to my head."

"Your arm is cramped perhaps, sir. You may have been leaning on it too heavily and pressed the nerves."

"I—I don't think so. There's something amiss, I'm sure. I don't feel quite steady. I—I——"

While his grandfather was saying the words last recorded, Chatham rose, pulled the bell, and went to the old gentleman's chair.

"Perhaps it would be better if you were to lie down," said he. "Shall I assist you?" and he offered to support Sir Chesterfield's left arm so that he might rise. The baronet got to his legs without much apparent difficulty. But then he complained of faintness, and said that his sight was indistinct. His grandson had deposited him on the sofa by the time that the butler entered in answer to the bell.

"Send for Mr Curtis, Johnstone" (there was still a Mr Curtis, though it wasn't our old acquaintance), "and then return. My grandfather is indisposed."

They untied his cravat, which might in those days be a cause of great relief, for it was a thing of many folds, and about five inches broad. They damped his forehead, and brought harts-horn and other stimulants. Chatham had not thought of summoning his mother, but Mrs Salusbury soon became aware that something unusual had occurred, and came on the scene. As at all times, she showed that she had her wits about her. She did not propose to dose the patient, but she, by an arrangement of pillows, effected for him an easy position. Then she got the room to a temperature such as, by feeling his hands and forehead, she ascertained to be comfortable to him. She screened his eyes from the light, and bathed his temples with a simple lotion. The old man said very little, and did not always speak to the purpose; but it was soon plain that the lady's ministrations had made circumstances more endurable, if they had not reduced the indisposition.

Sir Chesterfield was able to speak pretty coherently to Mr Curtis, who would not state his opinion of the case, but said that, as the head seemed somewhat oppressed, he would take away a little blood as a first step. He thereupon tied up the poor man's left arm, and took away some ounces of his old

blood—a loss which, as one is apt to imagine, he could but ill endure. That, however, was the process to which our great-grandfathers were generally subjected when anything ailed them. After the bleeding, he ordered that the patient should be laid in bed as gently as possible, that medicine (which he would send) should be given to him at prescribed periods, and that an attendant should watch him through the night.

"You will, of course, send for me if you should see occasion," said Mr Curtis on taking his leave. "If I get no message, I propose to be here early in the morning."

When all the directions of the medical man had been carried out, and when old Sir Chesterfield had taken his first dose of medicine, and had sunk into a lethargic condition, Chatham and his mother were able to discuss the sad event.

"It may not be a very serious attack," said the young man. "My grandfather has been so exceptionally healthy, that a slight indisposition of his causes alarm. I confess, though, I do not like that numbness of his arm."

"The numbness," answered Mrs Dunstan, "may or may not have resulted from some simple cause. I mean to say that it is not necessarily a very alarming symptom. That bleeding causes me more apprehension than any symptom of the original complaint. I am sure our poor patient will be weakened by the treatment."

"Doctors should know best," answered Chatham. "I hope that he will have a quiet night, and then, perhaps, we may find the case has a better aspect in the morning. Wolsey will not be late in returning, and we shall be able to tell him to-night what has happened."

"The opportunity which we thought that Wolsey's absence would have afforded you could not, after all, be turned to account," the lady observed. "You must defer all action now until you see how things may go with your grandfather. The delay may be very short, but your disappointment adds to the misfortune."

"There seems a fate against me," Chatham answered; "but there is perhaps one advantage in these crosses. They enable me to feel certain that I know my own mind as to this fair girl. Delays and disappointments, instead of wearying me or chilling my affection, make me only the more determined and eager."

"They often have that effect," returned his mother; "and were there no other proof of your affections being firmly fixed, your remark would not signify much. But I trust that your affection is deeply rooted and unchangeable."

When Mr Curtis paid his visit next morning, he said that he

could not pronounce Sir Chesterfield to be any better. He desired that his patient should be kept perfectly quiet, that he should be carefully watched, and that his medicine should be administered with regularity. "There is," said he, "partial paralysis; from what cause, I cannot distinctly say. It may pass in a few hours. On the other hand, it is possible that there may be a second seizure. I am doing what I can to provide against that. It is well that I took some blood, or it might have occurred before this."

Before night there was a change, and for the worse. It was not violent nor very sudden, but it was alarming. Mrs Salisbury remarked that the patient's utterance was indistinct, and on directing her attention to the change, she became convinced that the indistinctness was increasing. Mr Curtis now said that the case had become very serious, and that the attack, although it might not prove fatal, could hardly be wholly cured. It would leave its mark in some form or other. But next morning there appeared additional evil signs. The face was distorted, and such words as the tongue could contrive to utter seemed to be neither to the purpose nor coherent. Evidently it was now time to prepare for the worst. To follow the complaint through all its phases until, after a smart struggle with his vigorous constitution, it killed the old man, would not be agreeable nor useful. He died very peacefully ten days after he was attacked, and three days after he had entirely lost his consciousness. There was unaffected grief for him in his household; and throughout the neighbourhood of Traseaden it was felt that a familiar form had been taken from before men's eyes, and that, on the whole, they were sorry that he was gone.

CHAPTER II.

THE FAMILIES GRAVITATE TO EACH OTHER.

By dint of having lived so long, Sir Chesterfield at his death obtained the public regard in a degree, and of a character, such as had never been accorded to him in his lifetime. The venerable baronet, it was said, had been a link connecting the present with the times before the great wars, when his Majesty was young and vigorous, when Wilkes was worshipped, and when Warren Hastings was worried. He had been the associate of

innumerable celebrities now departed, whose actions and sayings were on the occasion appropriately recounted for the benefit of later generations. Himself a wit, a man of the world, a refined member of the *beau monde*, he had become a chronicle when he ceased to play an active part, and to the last of his days he delighted, by his anecdotes and his *jeux d'esprit*, all who were privileged to know him in retirement. Lest the gaiety ascribed to the departed senior should be taken to denote an unbecoming levity in one so circumstanced, care was taken to add that Sir Chesterfield's stern devotion to right and British independence had always prevented him from attaching himself to a party or taking an active part in politics. He was known to have inclined to either side which appeared to him at a particular time to be taking the liberal and honest view of our affairs. And as a staunch supporter of the Established Church, he had done work which, if not ostentatious, had nevertheless its great and undoubted merit, and which would follow him to regions into which our vision could not at present extend.

This showed a good disposition on the part of the writers, and was satisfactory and soothing to the few relatives and friends who were placed in mourning. The general public, not remembering anything which contradicted the obituary notices, and not caring to test their accuracy, acquiesced; and thus Sir Chesterfield's posthumous reputation was moulded and certified—thus were its features struck for the information of posterity. It did not matter if an elderly dissentient, with too good a memory, here or there thought that the memorials were a little too favourable, or even that they were in important points untrue. Nobody chose to dispute them, and they remain to this day a guide to those who would investigate the characters of that period.

Among those who "had their own opinions" about the spirit that was gone, and over his cold ashes upbraided him in their own circle, were, one may be sure, our friends of the Clowance family. They were not, to do them justice, loud or abusive when the death was announced, but rather did they quietly reflect that divine justice is retributive, and that that sinner was gone at last to his account. But these friendly paragraphs *in memoriam* tried their equanimity rather more than it could bear. It was bad enough to keep silent and quiet under the injuries which they had had to endure; but to hear the author of those injuries applauded as a just and upright man, and regretted as a loss to society, was somewhat beyond toleration.

Doris had just read aloud one of these tributes which a local paper had published, when Miss Clowance, making a strong

effort to keep calm, grew very red in the face, and straightened herself to a rigid position in her chair, as she said—

"When such a person as that can have anything approaching to a good reputation, it should be matter of supreme indifference to us all what the world says."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Eleanor, with bitter contempt. "I suppose a greater villain, a more designing knave, a—— Now I wonder whether, every time we read praises of a dead person, there are those behind the scenes who know, as we do in this case, the whole to be an imposture? I shall never after this be without the strongest suspicion when any one is well spoken of."

"We cannot be the only people who have suffered by that wicked man's craft," answered Dorothy; "there must be hundreds who know his worthlessness as well as we do. Yet all these are silent, and allow those who know really nothing of the matter to invent a character for him, and to mislead the whole community."

"Better men have ended their lives on the gallows," said Eleanor. "Well, his career is over. I hope that he repented, although he never showed to *us* any sign that his conscience was touched."

"Yes, as you say, Eleanor, his career is over." And Dorothy, as she said this, looked hard at her sister, thereby indicating that there was no need of dwelling upon matters which might furnish argument against Chatham's suit. "I am only gratified that he will be succeeded in his property, as well as in his title, by a grandson who is exceedingly unlike him in disposition."

"Yes, indeed," answered Eleanor, understanding the hint, "our acquaintance will be Sir Chatham Salusbury now, and, without doubt, the owner of dear Traseaden, and of the greater part of the property."

"It will not be long before there is a Lady Salusbury once more. I trust she may be some one whom we can visit and like. It would gratify me exceedingly to be a guest again at a house with which I was so familiar in my youth, more especially if the mistress were a person for whom I could feel a sincere regard."

"It would be like renewing one's girlhood, would it not, Dorothy? Oh, the idea is too pleasant ever to be realised!"

"As strange things have happened before now with regard to the old Hall. We cannot tell what is coming."

"I daresay we shall see Mr Salusbury—I mean Sir Chatham Salusbury—before very long. If he should invite us to his house, would there be any longer an objection to our going?"

"We can put off the discussion of that question, Eleanor, for the present. Time enough when we are invited. Now, Doris, my dear, if you are coming out with me, it is time to be getting ready. It is not very warm, and you had better be well clad. To think that people should be vying with each other to invent praises of that wicked, vile man!"

Doris did not require to be reminded of the change in Chatham's fortune and style. She was only too much distressed by it, for she knew that the pain which she must cause to her aunts by her refusal of his offer must be ten times greater now that he was a baronet in actual possession, than it would have been during his grandfather's life. Accordingly, she was suffering acutely—loathing to run counter to their wishes, and wholly unable to take the steps which, of all steps, they would just now most desire. And yet the change which had taken place was not without its modicum of comfort. The new baronet could not be married now for some months, and possibly he might not speak of marriage at present. At any rate, he would probably not be urgent for a decided answer at once. This was a respite, and hailed and appreciated as such; though of what use it could be to put off the evil day, what favourable turn of things was likely to happen in the interval thus gained, was more than could be guessed, probably more than Doris could herself have explained.

During all the sad and gloomy time which followed his grandfather's seizure, Chatham did not, one may be sure, forget his love, nor fail to reflect how the sorrowful event, which was for the moment subduing every one's selfish feelings, might remove all obstacles to his asking for Doris. If he had been superstitious, he might have fancied that fate, in closing the poor old man's lips just as he was about to pronounce graciously on Chatham's wishes, had decreed against the marriage. But he took the opposite view, and determined that fate, having already decided in his favour, had declined to have the event brought about by human management, but chose that it should come to pass according to the irrevocable decrees of destiny. These were his thoughts; but he postponed all action tending to his own gratification as long as duty to his living or his dead ancestor demanded his attention.

Soon, however, after the old baronet had been honourably and solemnly laid in the grave, Sir Chatham besought his mother to say whether anything now hindered him from laying his title and his fortune at Doris's feet. Mrs Salusbury was aware of no obstacle except the interval that must be suffered to elapse between his grandfather's death and the marriage.

The lady thought that it might be better not at this moment to press his suit, as he would probably press it with ardour and insistence, and then, if he should obtain a favourable answer, be obliged to postpone for a period the happiness for which he had been entreating. She counselled that he should continue his courtship as devotedly as he could desire, but that his proposal (unless circumstances should urge him to hasten it) should be delayed until he was in a position to follow it up by an immediate marriage. "Then," said she, "if there should be any voice for delay, it will not be yours."

Thus it came about that Sir Chatham, although consumed by his desire to secure Doris's consent, with the greatest unwillingness and pain refrained from bringing his courtship to an issue, but nevertheless showed plainly that he did not keep silence through any cooling of his passion. He was more attentive than he ever had been; indeed, so marked was his devotion that the world of Veorse thought itself at liberty to assume the fact of the engagement, and commented freely on the coming change in Miss Adair's position. Everything seemed entirely favourable to the marriage. The gossips, who might perhaps have croaked a little about the known ill-luck of the Deane family, had been silenced by the happy outcome of Una's little romance. The argument to be drawn from that story was not that the Deanes would be victims of adverse fortune, but that their good genius would finally triumph over contrary influences, however strong and obstinate these latter might be.

Sir Chatham presented himself quite at the right time at Miss Clowance's house—that is to say, as soon after the funeral as was becoming. He behaved so discreetly on the occasion that everybody rather warmed towards him. Whatever other people may have known or felt, he knew nothing of his grandfather but what was honourable, he had experienced from him only kindness, and his regret was unfeigned and manly. He betrayed not the least consciousness of his importance having increased, far less did he allow it to appear that he thought himself more acceptable as a lover in consequence of his accession to fortune. Indeed, he was too much and too seriously in love to have place for any such thoughts in his mind. So great was his desire to possess Doris, that his acquisitions seemed to him but as dross for any influence they might have on his wooing; and it was not with boldness, but with increased doubt, that he presented himself again before his idol. The whole household appeared to him so high-minded and dignified, that he, with a lover's timidity, fancied they would not stoop to considerations such as rank or money. He thought less of

these accidents himself when they seemed incapable of advancing his courtship; and so his unpretending demeanour was really not assumed.

Sir Chesterfield's death, if it did not take away all the soreness from the Deane ladies, did nevertheless remove a serious impediment to their good dispositions towards Chatham. The offence had practically to a great extent disappeared when the offender was represented in the world only by a grandson who had not been born when it was committed. It could not be but that the changed circumstances would open the way to a heartier understanding. Chatham, on his side, was, as has been said, in a mood which caused him to appear to advantage. The consequence was that everybody was conscious of a freer intercourse; it was difficult to say where in particular there was a change, but relations had become sensibly more cordial.

Encouraged by the favourable look of things, Chatham expressed his regret for the cruel fate which persistently interposed to prevent an acquaintance between the Clowance family and his mother. He ventured again to hope that, after a short time, the acquaintance might be brought about; and he was gratified to observe that the civil reply to his remark seemed to be much more in earnest than the commonplaces with which the same words had formerly been met.

Not to lose altogether so favourable an opportunity, Sir Chatham thought he would fasten one link, if it were only a slight one, in the chain of friendliness. He asked leave to bring his brother Wolsey and to present him, which leave was graciously given.

Chatham went away after this visit much comforted. There had been a warmth about the ladies which he never remarked before. He could not be mistaken about this. It was of good omen; and he wended homewards in a state of exaltation. He even began to build castles in the air, and to think over the settlements which he would make whenever the happy time should arrive for arranging them. And this led him back to the promise which his mother had made to endow him from resources of her own. She would, as he hoped, take some definite action about this soon.

Then it occurred to him that this private wealth of his mother was a somewhat mysterious possession. He had never heard that she was an heiress; and it was certain that she had derived nothing from the Salusburys. Whence had the money come? It was looking the gift-horse in the mouth, certainly; but yet he could not help wondering how his mother had become wealthy. This wonder led to another. They knew

only in a very general way what his mother's life had been since the time of his childhood. It was curious how they had been content to know so little concerning it as long as his grandfather lived.

That was the way in which his thoughts ran after his visit. There were other people set thinking, and their tongues set running by the same visit.

"Well, Salusbury though he is," said aunt Eleanor, "Sir Chatham is an elegant man. I think I shall feel less regretful about the property now that he is the owner. Don't you think, Doris dear, that he looked very distinguished in his mourning?"

"I did not take much notice of his looks, aunt Eleanor; but I liked his manner to-day better than ever I have liked it before. He seemed natural and melancholy. I have at other times thought him a little artificial and not very sincere."

Mis Clowance gave a little nod, and said, "It does not follow, because there have been insincere persons in the family, that all must be insincere. His poor old great-uncle, whatever may have been his shortcomings, was certainly an ingenuous man. I hope that Sir Chatham takes after him—indeed, I believe that he does."

"It is his brother who bears Wolsey's name. I wonder if *he* at all resembles the Wolsey with whom we once were so familiar," said Eleanor. "It will be strange to have a Wolsey Salusbury for an acquaintance again after so many years."

"There can be no doubt," answered Miss Clowance, "that the new baronet desires in every way to show a kindly feeling towards our family. He is a person of some importance now, and we ought to feel obliged by his regard. He was very friendly to Felix—showed, indeed, that he admires Felix very much. I know that Una likes him. We can hardly refuse, even if we would, to be acquainted with his mother, when he asks it so earnestly. We may find her a very nice person."

"You will see Traseaden, Doris," said Eleanor on this; "you have heard us talk enough about it. You will judge for yourself whether we have represented it fairly. Dear old place!"

Doris knew quite well what all this meant, and felt sick at heart. Though she had got a slight reprieve, the time was not far distant when she must crush out all the hopes and comforting fancies which, as she knew, the poor old ladies were allowing to establish themselves in their minds.

Wolsey Salusbury was brought to the house and introduced by his brother. Wolsey did not make a particularly good im-

pression, although he evidently took pains to please. He was less polished than his brother; seemed to recommend himself by plainness of manner, and an absence of pretension in his words and acts. Wolsey wasn't proud, as he often said. He would have had one believe that he was a frank, outspoken, simple, kind-hearted fellow. On some people he had managed to impose himself as such; but persons of any penetration did not take him for what he seemed. Wolsey had got only a younger son's portion from his grandfather; he knew that the day was coming when he could no longer find a home in Traseaden Hall; and he was more anxious than ever he had been that men should think well of him, for he had yet to find his proper line in life.

CHAPTER III.

LES QUATRE DOIGTS.

It was about this time that the Clowance ladies were delighted by an announcement that their brother-in-law, Captain Oakley, was coming into the neighbourhood of Veorse for a short time, about some matters of duty. Although the nation had reduced its fighting establishment, it had not yet been able to banish the idea that war, somehow or other, was the normal condition of the nation, and that we should be engaged in it again before long. Accordingly, the Government was keeping a sharp eye on the *matériel* of the services, and endeavouring to discover how during this interval of repose it might be improved, so as to be efficient when the inevitable time should come for its employment. Inventors knew this, and were at work, solid ones and flighty ones, endeavouring to benefit the army and navy, or at the least to benefit themselves, by wonderful devices. A genius claimed to have discovered a new projectile, so deadly and so certain that it could not fail to give the advantage to the side which might be able to use it, even though the other side should be superior in every other kind of munition and in numbers. He would not trust his invention to the authorities of any Government yard or arsenal, lest its principle should be discovered by some unscrupulous official, and he should be defrauded of the reward of much outlay and of many years of hard study.

But he would not object to exhibiting his project, in some

remote spot, to a select and small body of officers, in whose honour and discretion he could feel perfect reliance. The scheme, as set before the war authorities, appeared to them sufficiently promising to justify inspection. Accordingly, three officers were appointed to go down to Cookwort-in-the-Mire, where the invention could be tested with much privacy, there being plenty of open ground there, and scarcely an inhabitant near it. Cookwort-in-the-Mire is not more than eleven miles from Veorse by the carriage road, and it is not more than eight miles distant to them who can make their way by cross-cuts.

Captain Oakley was one of the officers employed on this examination. As the performance of the duty was kept as secret as might be, Oakley simply informed his relatives that he was paying an official visit (about which the less said the better) to a town in their neighbourhood, and that although he could not, for the duty's sake, take up his quarters in their house, yet that he hoped to be able to see them when he could be absent from his work. There were particular and very good reasons why Una did not accompany him into the Furze Range. It would have been pleasanter if she had come also, but that could not be; and it would still be a great pleasure to see her husband.

As they thought over the accident of his coming, it appeared very opportune. Sir Chatham Salusbury's attitude was so significant, that family councils might at any moment be desirable. Moreover, it was thought likely that Oakley might be able to influence Doris in forming her decision.

On the first convenient opportunity, Oakley came over to Veorse in the evening. His meeting with his wife's relations was very hearty on both sides. He was not a whit less warm or less agreeable than when he was in the house as a wooer, and of course doing his best to impress all the family favourably. In excellent spirits, with plenty to tell, and charged with innumerable messages from Una, he made them very lively; and he did not soon tire of answering questions, of which not a few were addressed to him, they coming from all sides. It could not be a long visit, because Oakley had to return to Cookwort and sleep there, so as to be ready for his work in the morning. He had come over on horseback, and thus been able to avail himself of his local knowledge and use the short route. But with all this, he had to leave them pretty early.

When speaking of the road by which he had come, as that road for the last three miles at the Veorse end was the same which led thither from Traseaden Hall, he not unnaturally made some inquiries about the new baronet, with whom he had

been so friendly at the time of his marriage. This led to answers which he perceived to be rather guarded and measured. Consequently he found occasion before he left to have a little confidential conversation with Miss Clowance.

It soon appeared that Oakley was not only favourable to, but eager for, Doris accepting Sir Chatham. He had not, as he said, given up L'Estrange's cause willingly, nor as long as it seemed to him tenable. But he was compelled to say that, after long and anxious consideration of the case, he was constrained to wish and advise that Doris should, for her own sake, cease to think of him. That might not be easy to a person of Doris's disposition; but, as all the world knew, nothing effaced the scar of an old love so effectually as a new wound of the same kind. Most fortunate, therefore, did he think it, that a new pretender to her favour had appeared in a shape so eligible as that of Sir Chatham Salusbury. He would favour Sir Chatham to the utmost of his power. This was a great comfort to the aunts. They felt they had now a most important ally; and they began to think of Traseaden more hopefully than they had allowed themselves to do before for many a year.

Oakley arranged to come in to Veorse to spend a particular evening, and as the evenings were the only occasions, except Sundays, when he had a chance of seeing his old acquaintances, a little party was asked to meet him. Mr Wolsey Salusbury, happening to call a day or two before the party, was told that it was to take place.

"I have never met Captain Oakley," said he; "I feel that I ought to make his acquaintance. He is a man, by Gad, that one ought to know. Everybody admires him!"

To this the answer of course was, that Captain Oakley was occupied by business all the day at Cookwort, and the only time to see him was of an evening, when he sometimes rode over.

"Oh, really!" answered Wolsey. "That is most unfortunate for me. At present, of course, I do not go out in the evening."

Hereupon it was represented that the party was to be exceedingly small and quiet,—only a few intimate friends,—indeed, it was scarce worthy the name of a party; it might just be looked upon as their family circle, with a friend or two dropped in for friendly chat. If Mr Salusbury would join them for an hour, he would not have to complain of gaiety; there was much more danger of his thinking it stupid.

Wolsey really did not know. He wished to meet Captain Oakley, it was true, but it would be awkward to leave his

mother alone in the evening. His brother had been summoned to town on some public business, and would be absent for a day or two, and therefore he was afraid—at the same time, just for half an hour, perhaps—well, he would try—he would if possible make his visit to Captain Oakley in the evening—he hoped he should be able to manage it.

The truth was, that Mr Salusbury had had quite enough of staying at home, and that he readily made excuse for getting a little company.

Some old friends of both sexes were the guests. Oakley came over in good time, and they had a cheerful tea. He was complimented on his healthy appearance, because at the time of the marriage, although his wound was pretty well healed, he had still looked somewhat delicate.

"Thank God," he said, "he was as sound as he had ever been in his life."

And then there were pleasant little jokes about matrimony having restored him; and by natural sequence all manner of questions concerning Una, and hopes that they would soon hear good accounts of her. The only ill-turn that they had ever known Oakley to do, was the taking away Mrs Oakley from their society. They hoped they would see her among them once more, and soon.

After a good time given to conversation, four of the inveterate card-players settled down to the inevitable rubber. Oakley remained talking with some of the friends most interested in him, and a few of the young men, after standing about for a while, gravitated together and began a round game.

Soon after they started it Mr Salusbury was announced, and he made for the moment a little disturbance by his entry. This speedily subsided; he and Oakley became known to each other, and the party proceeded with its amusements.

Oakley had a word of regret to say concerning the late baronet, whom he had once seen, as may be remembered, and he made inquiries concerning the present holder of the title. His own stay in the Furze Range, he was afraid, would not be long, and he should be glad to see Sir Chatham before he left. Wolsey said that his brother would probably return in a day or two to Traseaden. And then it would seem that Mr Salusbury had said pretty nearly all he wished to the naval hero, for after one or two commonplaces more he moved away and commenced talking to some one else.

Wolsey, it is suspected, cared little in reality about knowing Oakley. He found Traseaden tedious, wanted diversion of some kind, and had made the sailor an excuse for coming to a small

party. He had seen the table where the round game was being played, and, as he exchanged a few words first with one and then with another of the company, he was working his way to that point, which was for him, unfortunately, always a point of attraction. The table reached, he stood for a while observing the play; then he declined, in not very decided terms, to sit down and take a hand; finally he did sit down, "just for five minutes."

The last was a very meaningless phrase. Wolsey, once settled to his favourite pastime, took no note of time. Five minutes or five hours were much the same to his appreciation; so it need not be stated that he did *not* rise in five minutes, or that he was soon deeply interested in the game, and doing all he could, by doubling stakes, running hairbreadth risks, and offering bets, to get the most excitement out of what had been intended by those who commenced it to be very moderate play. The stimulus thus applied rendered the whole table more earnest. The earnestness showed itself in their looks and exclamations. They drew upon them the attention of the whole room, and there was a general move towards the scene of such warm contention.

The lookers-on found that they would need to be silent and discreet, for the players had become much in earnest—had ceased to talk and joke, and were intent upon the accidents of the game.

"By George, I take the pool. Devilish lucky!" said Mr Salusbury. "I'm quite ashamed; but I don't mind giving you revenge. I'll make it guineas instead of crowns, if you fancy it. Not for me, you know; I don't care, but as we can't play much longer, that will give you a better chance of making me disgorge my winnings, ha, ha!"

They were quiet, unsuspecting people, and thought more of being polite to the new-comer than of anything else with regard to the game. Perhaps, too, they were a little shy about differing from one who knew the ways of the fashionable world better than they did. At any rate, they consented to Salusbury's proposal.

The spectators of the game were standing round in little groups. Oakley and Doris were behind Wolsey, the young lady entering into the rapture of the game, and growing warmer and warmer in her sympathies. Oakley had been holding Doris's hand, but he suddenly let it go and began to move away from the table. She looked up at him, and saw on his face an expression which in her experience was quite new to it,—not a pleased nor an approving expression. She followed

him quickly, and asked softly whether anything were the matter. "Well, yes, my love," Oakley answered. "I remembered a very disagreeable circumstance which happened several years ago, and it caused me a momentary shudder. Never mind, it is over now. I am sorry that I disturbed you."

Oakley had certainly been reminded of something very disagreeable in the past. It had once been his duty to take part in the investigation of a matter affecting an officer's reputation for fair play. The result was the exposure of a cheat who had only too long been enriching himself by his villany. In the course of that inquiry Oakley became aware of one or two tricks resorted to by sharpers at cards.

To his surprise and horror, he saw Wolsey Salusbury execute one of these disreputable tricks, while he was looking on at the round game. Rather, as he put the matter to himself, he fancied that he saw Wolsey do this, for he would not believe that his eyes had served him fairly. A man of good family, playing for moderate stakes in a private house, could surely never have been guilty of a thing so dishonourable. It was impossible. He would wait till the chance should offer of again so transgressing, and assure himself that he had made a mistake. He waited, and there was no mistake next time. Clearly he saw Wolsey perform the rogue's trick, which was to lead to his gaining at the utmost five or six guineas!

It was at the moment of becoming convinced that this was the case that Oakley started and walked away from the table, to the surprise of Doris. She, seeing that something fretted him, refrained from courting his attention, and Oakley rapidly ran over in his mind what it behoved him to do. He had no proof of what he had seen; he still fancied that the thing had not been done in earnest—that is, that Wolsey had been for amusement trying his skill at the device rather than cheating for gain. He thought, too, of Wolsey's friends, and of the relation in which Sir Chatham might soon stand to the young girl beside him, whose bright eyes were glancing towards him hurriedly and with affright, and whose colour was coming and going in a way which would have rather shaken a lover's sobriety.

Oakley could not think of letting the thing pass, and he soon decided on what his line of action should be.

Having told Doris that he had remembered some matter which must be seen to, and that he intended to return very shortly, he went into the dining-room, where the servants were laying the table for supper, and where Eleanor was giving some directions. Her he requested to let him have the use of the room

for ten minutes; and, having secured this, he sent a servant to say that a gentleman—no name to be mentioned—was waiting in the next room to speak to Mr Salusbury on business of importance.

Wolsey was very cross at being disturbed, but he apologised to the players for interrupting the game, and came with an inquiring look upon his face to see what was wanted of him. When he found only Oakley in the room, he was at a loss altogether; but the latter shut the door, and then turned and said—"I have requested this interview with you, Mr Salusbury, to tell you that I stood behind you just now at the card-table, and that I twice saw how you managed to run up your score."

Wolsey changed colour at this, but did not lose self-possession. "I don't understand," he said quietly; "what do you mean?"

"If I must be plain," said the sailor, "I saw you twice perform the trick known among gamblers as the '*quatre-doigts*.'"

"Sir," answered Wolsey, "though I do not understand your terms, it is clear that your remark points to something dishonourable. Do you dare to imply——"

"Allow me to interrupt you for a moment," put in Oakley very calmly, but with a determination that there was no mistaking in his manner. "What I have said to you now I am quite ready to say before witnesses, and to take the consequences, if you desire it."

Now, "the consequences" were what Wolsey always desired to avoid. He knew that Oakley would not flinch, that bluster would be useless, and that diplomacy, if he could call any to his assistance, was the thing to resort to.

"My character," said he, "must of course be cleared of the aspersion which you have thought fit to cast on it. But before I invite the world to sit in judgment upon me, I should like to understand something of your motives for making such a charge."

"Motive!" exclaimed Oakley; "motive! I see a game of card-sharping carried on in a respectable house by one who calls himself a gentleman, and has been received there as such, and I require no motive but my own sense of right to call attention to it. You must admit that I have not done so harshly or vindictively."

"Supposing you had been right in your idea, you have not been harsh. My complaint is that such a thing should be said of me at all. I am a magistrate, and have some experience in mistaken accusations. Now, there is something—since you have given me a few moments to think—something which seems to me to require explanation."

Oakley bowed, but was silent.

"A person who is evidently *au fait* at the devices of cheats and swindlers, and well versed in their jargon,—of course I refer to yourself,—thinks proper to accuse me—privately, I allow, but still to accuse me—of being guilty of one of the tricks with which he is himself familiar, but of which I am ignorant and innocent."

Wolsey, whose brain had been at work all through the interview, had shrewdly considered what Oakley's motive could be for calling him into another room and thus gently charging him with an offence which was now beyond proof. The usual course in such cases was, as unpleasant memories only too sharply admonished him, to catch the cheat in his act and expose him before the view of his intended victims, who are not generally in a merciful humour. His studies of human nature (which had been numerous) had not given him a high opinion of it. He generally looked for base motives, and his reading of the present case by the light of his experience showed him that Oakley must propose to obtain some advantage for himself in exchange for keeping the transaction quiet. Hence the very blundering attempt to carry the war into the enemy's country, or, in other words, to tax Oakley with being a brother practitioner. But the quiet answer which he got convinced him that he had been blundering.

"I understand your trick," Oakley said, "or I could not have detected and named it. If you have a doubt about my motive in not publicly denouncing your conduct, come now into the drawing-room, and I will publish what I saw, and what I accuse you of, and then give you every opportunity of proving your innocence in the field."

"I hardly see what could be gained by that. There would be your word against mine, but no proof. A hostile meeting could not convict or clear me. I wish it could, and that the matter could be brought to issue without delay. Now, I am willing to admit that you *thought* you saw something unusual. I am aware that I am careless in shuffling owing to a weakness in the fingers of my right hand, and that to prevent the cards from falling I catch them awkwardly between the second and third, and the third and fourth fingers."

"You admit that?" said Oakley; "perhaps you do not perceive that by so doing you show me that you are well acquainted with the '*quatre-doigts*,' of which just now you declared yourself ignorant. If you do not know how the trick is done, how could you imagine what might have seemed to me to resemble it?"

"I simply," said Wolsey, "mentioned a peculiarity of my

own in handling the cards, without knowing or saying how far it might be like any of the sleights with which you are conversant."

This was impudent enough, but it did not answer its purpose. Wolsey saw that he had committed himself. And Oakley, sure that he did see it, pressed him no further, but went on to say—

"I will tell you now what passed through my mind while I was observing you at your devices. I could not imagine that such paltry stakes as you were playing for could tempt you to acts of dishonesty, and so I imagined that you were taking advantage of an opportunity when, from the smallness of the gains or losses, you could be comparatively cool in your proceedings, to try whether an art which you had learned theoretically could be carried into practice or not. Although I have no doubt about what I saw, it is possible that there may not have been a very nefarious intention."

"You are right there," said Wolsey; "there certainly was not."

"I was going on to remark that the occurrence will not be mentioned by me as long as there is no further reason to doubt the fairness of your play, and provided that you do not end a winner in the game which is to be concluded on your return to the drawing-room."

"You then withdraw your accusation?"

"I have not made what may be called an accusation. Only, seeing you on the brink of what appeared to me to be a dangerous precipice, I thought I would give you a word of caution. What I could detect, others, depend upon it, could detect also. I trust that you will never be so misguided again."

"Oh, if there is no accusation, then that alters the case," said Wolsey with effrontery. "As to what you may think yourself, that does not much affect me, so long as you do not mention your suspicions. I have no doubt that, if I live a little longer, you will be ready to acknowledge that you did me injustice."

"Then there is no more to be said," returned Oakley. "Let us separate while you are still in that hope. Whenever I may be convinced that I have judged you unfairly, depend on it that I will tell you so."

Thereupon Wolsey went off, while the sailor said to himself, "Either he is a novice, and was experimenting clumsily just now, or else he is a hardened sharper."

Later on, Oakley ascertained that Wolsey had not won anything at that last game in which he had been seen to play false; and then he allowed his mind to be occupied with other subjects.

CHAPTER IV.

A RIVAL HINTED AT.

Wolsey had acted his part well (he generally did act it well) in his interview with Oakley. He possessed coolness; but it did not in him indicate courage or even a strong will. He had an intuitive knowledge of how far effrontery could take a man, and he had worked through many a difficulty by showing a bold front.

Another art which he possessed was that of slipping cleverly out of a scrape—altering the complexion of it, in fact, and making an ignominious retreat appear like magnanimous forbearance, or a wrong pocketed up as lofty contempt. But when, on reaching his chamber after his evening at Miss Clowance's, he began to reckon with himself, and to ascertain what resources he had for rendering Oakley's tongue harmless, and setting him at defiance, he found very few, or rather none at all. If it had been an open contention, then possibly means might have been found of working round some of the witnesses, and of inducing them to take such views as might suit his purpose. But there was nobody to be wrought upon but Oakley, and he was very unlikely to change his opinion.

What need of working on anybody, or of taking further action in the matter? Oakley had promised to say nothing provided the offence were not repeated, and no one else suspected him. But Wolsey was not satisfied of this. He held, as has been said, very low views of human nature; and although he had been mistaken in supposing that Oakley ever meditated taking a share of his illicit gains, still he thought that the sailor meant to use the knowledge of his rascality in some way that might prove extremely injurious. Nothing could be proved, that he knew; but a good deal might be threatened or hinted that would quietly make him known for what he was; and here Wolsey's consciousness of many things which had happened at college, and in later days, caused him to unduly magnify Oakley's power to hurt him. If he should cease to juggle (which would be the only certain way of disarming Oakley), his chance of gain would be gone, and even then he would be watched by Oakley, and perhaps suspected by others to whom Oakley might have exposed him.

The situation at first view did not look pleasant; and Wolsey, on turning it over and regarding it thoroughly, did not like it

better. He felt that he was at Oakley's mercy, and grew very wild at the thought. There did not seem any way out of the perplexity, except one which was eminently distasteful to him. If he were to seek a quarrel, and fight the captain *à outrance*, there would be an end, one way or other, to his anxiety. He might fall, and so escape further distress regarding it, or he would put Oakley, and his secret with him, beyond the region where disclosures would be of any consequence. But to the adoption of this method the gambler could not brace himself. How else to free himself from fear of exposure he could not divine, and his mind was throughout that night cruelly exercised.

"If I only had that reckless indifference to danger which many men feel, nothing could be simpler than settling all by a duel," thought he. "I know more than one companion who would go out determinedly in such a case, win by coolness, and silence the adversary while earning the reputation of behaving bravely and nobly. Why the deuce cannot I do that? Damn it, there is some peculiarity in my nature which makes me shun actual conflict. I know it of old. There is no use in trying it. And pity it is, for if I could only make that fellow measure his length on the turf, my mind would be at ease again. Curse him! I wish I could see him dead!"

The day after this Sir Chatham Salusbury returned to Traseaden Hall, and in the course of the day he went into Veorse, and delighted himself with a visit to Doris. As might be expected, he heard of Oakley being in the neighbourhood, and he was, for many reasons, anxious to see him, and to show him attention. If only he could succeed in obtaining his heart's desire, Oakley and he would be closely connected. He would go over to Cookwort, and pay him a visit. But he was told that he must not do that, as Oakley was engaged all day with other officers, on duties which had to be conducted with secrecy. What, then, was to be done? The baronet would be greatly disappointed if he should be unable to bring about an interview.

It was fair Doris who suggested the means of his having half an hour of Oakley's society.

"My uncle Felix," said Doris, "will be over here on Friday evening for a short time. He cannot be here until after eight o'clock, and he will probably leave soon after ten, to sleep at Cookwort." Here she stopped.

But Sir Chatham was not slow to take up his parable. Miss Adair had made a suggestion which might be construed by a sanguine person into an invitation to her lover to come to them

on Friday evening. However much he might be inclined to accept it on Oakley's account, infinitely more was he desirous of doing so when thus attracted. "Would it be altogether too irregular a request, Miss Clowance, if I were to ask leave to come and sit with you awhile on Friday evening when Captain Oakley will be here?"

"Not at all irregular," Miss Clowance said. "They would be quite a family party, and possibly very stupid. If Sir Chatham Salusbury would come and enliven them, he should be very welcome, and Captain Oakley would, she was sure, be delighted at the addition to their circle."

Sir Chatham was almost as much pleased at Miss Clowance's reply as he had been at Doris's hint. It was friendly, and seemed to make less of a stranger of him than before. He felt elated at those tokens of success, was profuse in expressing his thanks for being permitted to come to their fireside on Friday evening, and said he would make a point of being there. Somehow it seemed to him that his prospects had never seemed so promising. When he thought over that night his hopes and fears, as he was constantly in the habit of doing, he was greatly disposed to try his fate at once while Oakley was in the way, for he thought (and we know that he thought truly) that the sailor might be likely to stand his friend in smoothing away any little difficulties. Yes, he really thought he would set his life (it seemed to him like that) upon a cast, and have all his doubts resolved on Friday. As soon as he had come to this resolution, the minutes seemed to be all weighted with lead; they would not move on. Chatham did not know how to bear his impatience. He became quite restless and feverish.

The lover was aware that his brother had, a day or two since, spent an evening at Miss Clowance's. Wolsey had not mentioned the visit to him, at which he was not at all surprised. Wolsey was a queer fellow always, and often reticent concerning matters about which no other man would have had the least reserve. Wolsey, as the reader may think, had his own reasons for not speaking of the party. He did not wish his mother and brother to know that he had been gambling to a late hour, and the events of that evening had raised a tempest in his breast which drove him nearly frantic. Chatham had observed how much Wolsey had been disturbed since his (Chatham's) return from town. He suspected that Wolsey might be fretted about some money matter, or that some annoyance was troubling him, and in the exaltation of his spirits at beginning to believe that Doris looked favourably on him, he could not see his brother's gloom without desiring to alleviate it.

"If it is money," thought the baronet, "I don't mind coming down with something to clear his brow; or if it's anything else, I'll give him comfort if I can." He was longing also, although he didn't say so even to himself, to get Wolsey to say something of his evening at the Clowances. If he could only hear Doris talked about, it would be some little solace to the pain which the tardy approach of Friday was cruelly inflicting. So he sought Wolsey in his chamber, and found him lying on a sofa evidently ill at ease. Glancing round, he saw a pistol-case on the table, and concluded at once that some quarrel was the cause of Wolsey's chagrin.

"What's the matter?" asked Wolsey in no hospitable voice as Chatham entered.

"That," answered Chatham, "is pretty much what I have come to ask. You—you haven't been out to-day, Wolsey?"

"Suppose I haven't, what of it?"

"It looks as if there were something amiss. You are not ill, are you?"

"Never better in my life. I can't think what you are driving at."

"I assure you I am driving at nothing, if everything, as you say, is going well with you. But I fancied that something was bothering you, and I came to ask if I could be of any help."

"Devilish good of you; but I can't think what you have got into your head. I've had one or two things to decide on which required a little thinking over; that's all."

"Glad to hear it, I am sure. But thinking over indifferent subjects does not usually cut you up as you have been for a day or two. As you tell me it's nothing, I don't want to interrupt you. But I really think my idea was reasonable. Any fellow, seeing how you took on, would have suspected——"

As Chatham was saying this, Wolsey saw him glance towards the pistol-case. He did not wish to have to explain why the case was there. He was not thinking of fighting a duel—certainly not. And it would be easy to disavow all such intention. But Wolsey had some reason for leading away Chatham's mind altogether from the pistols. He called his cool, crafty wits to his aid, and said quite suddenly—

"Chatham, I am afraid it is you, and not I, for whom friends ought to be anxious. It strikes me that you have been victimised by a pair of bright eyes."

"Glad to see that you can joke, Wolsey. I have no fear about you now."

"Well, it's a joke or not according to what you may be designing. If you're only amusing yourself, well and good; you

don't require a caution. But if you are really in love, take care!"

"Take care! why, I don't understand you. What the devil can you mean? Of whom are you talking?"

"I am talking of Miss—Miss—the pretty girl you know at Miss Clowance's. I hope there's nothing serious."

"And if there should be, what then?"

"Take care that she does not lead you a dance."

Chatham smiled at Wolsey's ignorance of Doris's unsophisticated nature. He thought no more about the pistols now that he could speak of his love.

"Rather an unlikely person to lead any one a dance!" he answered. "Why, Wolsey, you have judged without your usual penetration. Miss Adair—that's her name—Miss Adair is so simple and undesigning that she can hardly understand how a man can be in love with her, far less can she be capable of trifling with his feelings."

"So you may think, but there are others who could enlighten you on that head."

"How?"

"They might tell of the desperate love affair she had three years ago with a young military man."

"Pshaw!" answered Chatham; "somebody has been making fun of you. Miss Adair is quite young. She can hardly have been out of the nursery three years ago."

"Well, if you put it that way, I must assure you that it is you who are in error. I have ascertained beyond question that she had a most desperate affair in the winter of 1812-13—an engagement which lasted for months, and then a break off. She jilted him, or he jilted her, it's not known which."

"I never heard even a whisper of such a thing, and to me it seems most unlikely. Do you mind telling me your authority?"

"More than one person has spoken to me of it since first I took note of the matter. At the time when it happened we cared so little about the doings in the town that I never heard of it; but I fancy everybody knows of it. Captain Oakley, if you were to refer to him, would, I should think, be as likely as anybody to give you accurate information."

"Ah, perhaps!"

Wolsey had completely succeeded in diverting Chatham's thoughts from the pistols. He and his troubles were effectually out of Chatham's mind, as was all the exultation and anticipation of success which had shone there such a short while ago. Chatham could not be said as yet to be a believer in Wolsey's

story; indeed, he felt sure that there would be some explanation of it, and that Doris would be proved to have been hitherto unscathed by the powers of love. At the same time, it disturbed him wretchedly, and caused him to look forward to Friday with feelings greatly altered. The declaration of his love, which he had determined to make in some way or other on that evening, he now felt that he must postpone until the knot about the military officer had been loosened.

If it were true that Doris had had a lover, where was the harm of it? Wolsey had not attributed any misconduct to Doris. He had only advised Chatham to beware of her as a flirt, which, at any rate, Chatham was sure that she was not. Nevertheless, the whole matter was, to his view, altered if she had once given her heart to a lover. He felt that her insensibility to attentions, which he had chosen to attribute to the undeveloped state of her affections, had been his chief source of hope, as well as a great attraction to him. If that should prove to have been a delusion on his part, and Doris should know well the agitations which belong to love,—that power so rich both in honey and gall,—then her indifference to his marked advances must signify that he had no chance. He had a sense of injury, as if he had been deceived, supposing that there had been a former attachment. But if there were deceit, he had only deceived himself. Doris's conduct and that of her family had been consistent since he had known them. They were not bound, most certainly, to tell him Doris's history. Where, then, was his grievance? He didn't quite know; but he did feel aggrieved, or rather disappointed and mortified. Not that his admiration was lessened. He still thought Doris the most charming of girls; but he would find it an immense relief if the story should turn out to be baseless, as far as she was concerned.

He thought over all the steps which he could with propriety take to satisfy himself; and that suggested by Wolsey seemed to be of all the most eligible. He would ask Oakley to tell him in a friendly way about it. The clearing up of this matter would now be the business of Friday evening, instead of the pouring out of his own heart's passion and wishes.

Doris herself was scarcely less distressed than Sir Chatham. By signs on all sides she perceived that his offer was coming, and that her friends to a soul would support the baronet's pretensions. She knew also, only too well, that some of them, to disappoint whom would be like wounding her own spirit to death, would be bitterly chagrined by the course which she must follow. She had pleaded Chatham's cause to her own

heart. She had made much of his good qualities; she had taken account of his fortune and position; and she had not failed to review the delinquencies of Frederick l'Estrange. But the result of all this weighing of the case was, that she felt that she could not marry any but her first love, and that her first love she *would* not marry. Her state was pitiable; but in the most desperate cases there is generally some kind of balm. Doris found comfort, such as it was, in what Una had said to her just as she was leaving her home to be married. It would recur to her again and again.

When she saw what her course must be, it became a subject of anxious thought what mode of action would cause the least pain to her old and dear aunts, who were even now in imagination treading again the floors of Traseaden Hall, and so finding comfort for the wrongs and the long-suffering of their lives. "I am sure," thought the girl, "rather, I ought to say, *I think*, for I shall never be sure of anybody again—I think that Sir Chatham Salusbury is a generous man, and that he is capable of feeling for my trouble. If he should give me the opportunity, I will tell him my story, throw myself upon his kindness of heart, and ask him to assist me in breaking the blow to my relatives. He does not deserve a cold refusal, though a refusal there must be; and perhaps he will accept my confidence, if I cannot give him my love. There will be little difficulty for him in consoling himself for the want of a girl like me."

And so time wore on towards Friday night, which was destined to be a night well remembered by many people.

Captain Oakley had had a note from his sister-in-law, Miss Clowance, informing him that Sir Chatham Salusbury proposed to come into Veorse for half an hour on Friday evening, and entreating him, therefore, not to fail of coming, if the weather should be at all favourable. It occurred to him before he left Cookwort, that by some possibility Chatham (of whose advances he, of course, knew) might take some step that evening which might make his sisters-in-law desire to have his counsel; he therefore, as an opportunity offered for doing so, requested his colleagues to proceed on Saturday with a part of their duty which did not so much concern the navy, and from which, therefore, a naval member might absent himself. This arrangement, to which all very politely agreed, enabled Oakley to remain Saturday and Sunday in Veorsa. The weather was such when he set out as would have deterred a less resolute man; but he wrapped himself up well, and thought that after all they would not have considered it very foul weather at sea.

And he was rewarded for his firmness, for the sky cleared before he had done half his ride.

"So glad to see you, Felix; come quick to the fire," said the ladies, as the cold traveller was shown in.

"Thank you, dears," said Oakley; "but don't express your joy in too great a hurry. Wait till you know all that I have to tell."

"How, what? Is Una quite well?"

"Yes, dear little soul, Una is all right. What I alluded to as the rest of my information is, that I have come to stay here, if you can put me up without notice, otherwise at the inn, till Sunday evening. No work for me to-morrow, and you will have the charge of me. I could not give you notice of my stay, because I did not know about it myself till I was just leaving."

That made things better and better, they said. It was the very thing which for many reasons they would have desired. And then Felix got quite warm, and they had the late meal which had been prepared for him; and they all talked zealously, for there was plenty of news to give and to hear.

"If we had but known that you were going to stay, it would not have been necessary to bring Sir Chatham Salisbury out on such a rough night," said Eleanor.

"It is too late to send to stop him now, and, besides, it has cleared up. Quite fair during the latter part of my ride, and the moon got through."

"Perhaps," said Doris, "Sir Chatham can find it more convenient to come at night; if so, it would only embarrass him to put him off."

"Quite so," said Dorothy, who, as she spoke, looked at Eleanor. They had begun to notice that their niece spoke more than formerly both of and to Sir Chatham; and they tried to persuade themselves that there were little confidences between the lovers.

"It may be as you say, little girl," Oakley replied. "He will not, I think, pay quite so long a visit as his brother did the other night."

"I am sure he wouldn't sit down to cards if we had a party. I must say that I think Sir Chatham has a nice sense of propriety. He is a well-bred man," said Miss Clowance.

"Before I go back I must manage to pay him a visit at Traseaden Hall, and be introduced to his mother," said Oakley. "I hear she is a great favourite in the neighbourhood."

"We are all rather looking forward to going there," Eleanor said. "Now that that old man—that old—well, never mind—

now that old Sir Chesterfield is gone, the way is open to a friendly understanding."

"His mother may not have a long reign at the Hall," said Oakley. "I shouldn't wonder if there were another Lady Salusbury before long; eh, Doris?"

"I think it very likely," said Doris, quietly; "he is like one who will not be long in giving the place a mistress."

This remark rather threw a damp on the conversation, it was so calmly and unaffectedly made. Every one of Doris's hearers would have preferred to have her show a little consciousness, to be confused, and to say she didn't understand what was meant. During a pause which ensued, Oakley determined that he would have some conversation with his niece before he should return to Cookwort. The two sisters pondered whether this occasion of Oakley being with them would be used by Sir Chatham for bringing his suit to a hearing. They had scarcely recovered their former cheerfulness when the baronet was announced.

They had all managed to drop a degree or two too low in spirits, and Chatham, when he entered, wore a grave look, so that the evening did not promise to be very lively. Salusbury made the kindest inquiries after Una, and expressed great gratification in seeing Oakley so much recovered. He talked about the service, and gave his opinion, as a politician, that there would be further reductions, as the country could not bear even moderate taxation after so many years of war expenses. His manner to Doris was as attentive and impressive as usual, only, as they all felt, he was a little solemn, and sometimes *distrain*, which they had never before seen him to be. It looked quite as if the evening was to pass without the matter, on which everybody was intent, being advanced a stage, or being even mentioned. But that was not quite fated to be the case.

After Chatham had remained some three-quarters of an hour, his groom sent in to say that his horse was ready, according to instructions, but that it had not been brought to the door because it had come on again to rain heavily. They pressed him to remain a little longer, which he unwillingly did, imagining that he might be interrupting the discussion of family matters, for he did not know of Oakley remaining for the night. In about a quarter of an hour the rain was reported to be less heavy, and Sir Chatham protested that he must go, as he had business to attend to before going to bed.

"Well, if you must," said Oakley, "there is no kindness in inducing you to prolong your stay for a few minutes, because that might only give the rain time to come on again."

"Just so," answered Chatham; "I will make the most of the lull, and be at Traseaden, perhaps, before another deluge comes down."

"Fortunately," Oakley remarked, "I have got my best foul-weather wrap here, and will have the pleasure of lending it to you, if you will accept my offer. If you don't mind the weight, I will answer for it not letting a drop get at you."

"You are too kind," Chatham said. "You also have a long ride before you, and I can't take your cloak."

"No, pardon me. My arrangements were changed just before I left Cookwort. I am able to remain at Veorse till Sunday night. The wrap is therefore much at your service, and if you are good enough to send it here to-morrow or Sunday, it will be time enough for my return journey."

"In that case, I only too gratefully avail myself of so good an offer."

"Come, then," said Oakley, "take leave of the ladies, and I will speedily make you, if not a charming figure, entirely waterproof."

When they had got into a back room where Oakley kept his out-door appointments, the latter said, as he spread out his trusty pilot cloak, "We are nearly of a size, so this will cover you well; a little more to the right with that hand; that's it; so, now I will insure you to get home quite dry, let it rain as it may."

Suddenly Sir Chatham, with the great cloak on his shoulders, turned round, and spoke earnestly. He could not bear the thought of leaving without learning the truth about Doris's imputed love story.

"Pardon my abruptness," said he, "and excuse my detaining you for a minute or two now that we are alone together. I have been told to-day that your niece, Miss Adair, for whom I have the sincerest admiration, has been—possibly may now be—under engagement to marry. Will you permit me to ask whether there can be truth in the story? I do not, I assure you, ask from idle curiosity."

"I am sure you would not do that," was the answer, as Oakley recovered from the little start of mind caused by the unexpected turn of the conversation. "I quite believe that you have good reason for putting your question, and I do not know that I have any for not answering it. Miss Adair is, I know, under no engagement at present. Strictly speaking, she has never been so. But I believe that for some time she did consider herself under conditional promise to a young officer in the army."

Chatham's heart sunk as he answered, "Thank you for your confidence. In a few days you shall be quite satisfied as to my motive for being so inquisitive. Now, then, good night."

They shook hands and parted, Chatham starting on his way home, and Oakley returning to the drawing-room.

"What a time you have been, Felix!" said Miss Clowance. "We were wondering what you could be about."

"It took some time to pack him off," Felix replied; "and after he was in harness, he thought of a question which he wished to put to me, and that led to a few minutes' conversation—at least it seemed only a few minutes to me."

Both the elder ladies looked pointedly at Oakley as he said this, and received from him in reply a look which showed that something not unimportant had passed. Later on, when Doris had retired, he told them what Chatham's question was, and how he had answered it. The incident caused much discussion, and a good many surmises, hopeful and the contrary. Chatham's assurance, however, that in a few days he would give a satisfactory reason for his inquiry, showed that things were working towards a *dénouement*; so they separated for the night, under a conviction that doubt would be, to some extent, resolved before they were much older.

CHAPTER V.

A DEED OF DARKNESS.

Wolsey Salusbury's fear of, and exasperation against, Captain Oakley did not abate. On the contrary, brooding over the abasement which he had undergone in his last interview with Oakley made Wolsey more and more revengeful, and magnified to his mind the probability that the sailor meant to hold his discovery *in terrorem* over him. Oakley, or some one of his friends, would be always on the watch, and it would be impossible henceforth to enjoy a game at cards in peace. It was this last consideration, of a sword hanging always over his head, as we may suspect, which really made Wolsey so unhappy. Unpleasant as it was to be told to his face that he had been detected cheating, he could really have borne that smear upon his honour if the way in front had been perfectly clear. But it was by no means clear. Henceforth he would keep his place in society by

sufferance only; he would really be in bondage; he would be unable to speculate ever so moderately without a dozen eyes upon him, and the danger of some wiseacre challenging his play at any and every move. The situation was intolerable. Nobody, he thought, could be expected to drag through life on such terms. It was worse than the African slavery, about which Mr Wilberforce was so eloquent. A man would be doubly and trebly justified in fighting another who stood in the invidious position towards him that Oakley occupied towards *him* (Wolsey),—ay, and in killing him too. The world was large enough for any two given persons only when one of them was not too intimately acquainted with the peculiarities of the other.

Wolsey, as has been seen, did not think that he could make the game of fighting pay. But the turning over of the expedient of a duel in his mind had at least the effect of fastening his attention on one point, and that point was that the readiest way of restoring his mental serenity was putting Captain Oakley out of the way altogether. Though he did not admire fighting, he could look without flinching at violence which could be committed in cold blood and comparative safety. "If I can find a way of silencing his infernal tongue," thought Wolsey, "I don't see why I should not resort to it. Either something of the sort must be done, or my life will be simply a hell upon earth. I am not bound to endure that."

Now, after much consideration, Wolsey perceived that, by expending a not exorbitant sum of money, he might possibly procure the desired *quietus* for poor Oakley. It would, in effect, be no expense at all, as he thought; for, once he could play freely again, and without the dread of surveillance, the money would soon be recovered, and more to the back of it. The plan that struck him was this.

Since the wars had slackened and ended, there had been moving about the Furze Range a number of lawless and very objectionable characters. These seemed to be the product of the long war. They were incapable of settling down to a steady mode of life; and when the times no longer furnished occupation for rough, ready, and vagrant abilities, they did a little business in their own line in spite of the times, and were accordingly rather at odds with the civil law. Depredations, not always unattended with violence, were very common. Horse-stealing, very cleverly done, was quite a terror to the owners of stables and pastures; gangs of coiners were known to be about, and nobody dared take sixpence without a long ceremony of ringing and scrutinising; and there had been

several farmers stopped on the highway as they returned from market.

Wolsey, as a magistrate, had heard a good deal about these delinquencies. That could hardly be otherwise; but Wolsey, as a magistrate, somehow knew a good deal of what occurred behind the scenes in these cases—that is to say, he had information which he did not receive sitting on the bench, but which came to him rather by roundabout and secret channels. One impudent scamp, who had relations working on the Traseaden property, had had confidential communications with the magistrate, and had benefited thereby; indeed, it was chiefly by reason of magisterial leniency (to use only a mild word) that the *Varmint*, alias the *Corunian*, was still at large in the district. "The Varmint" had been a name bestowed on this adventurous spirit from his early youth, when he was distinguished in the poaching and dog-stealing line; the other name of "the Corunian" accrued on his return to his native fields after an absence in the years 1808-10, when he declared that he had fought as a volunteer under Sir John Moore, and not a soul believed that he had ever been near the army.

It had come to the magistrate's knowledge that the Corunian had had a leading hand in one or two little affairs on the highway, especially in one robbery wherein a traveller had been shot dead. Being bound to Wolsey already by favours received, the Corunian could hardly object to undertaking a job to serve Wolsey if a decent payment was to follow. So, no sooner had Mr Salusbury conceived this plan, than he took steps for putting it into execution. He sent to reopen negotiations with the Corunian, and he sought to assure himself as to the occasion of Oakley's next visit to Veorse, after which he would travel home in the dark.

Fortune was a little against him, inasmuch as the Corunian, in consequence of some action which had brought the eyes of the neighbourhood too persistently upon him, had temporarily withdrawn into another county. No doubt the scent of profit would have brought him speedily back; but Wolsey knew that opportunity would not wait. While he should be seeking out the Varmint in his retreat, and negotiating with him afar off, Oakley would have returned to his duties afloat, and be clear of the danger.

Thus had Wolsey wrought himself on to the design of murdering Oakley. He had acquainted himself with the intention of Oakley to ride into Veorse on Friday evening, and to ride back to Cookwort on Friday night. The weather was much broken; it would be difficult to distinguish people on the road;

and the Captain would not be soon missed. All this looked favourable to the project, when, lo! the defect of the principal was like to blow the whole scheme into air. There would never be such a chance again. What on earth was to be done? Could any ruffian be got to take the Corunian's part in the outrage? Impossible. Wolsey did not know of a suitable hand, and if he did, there was no time now for tampering with only half-known allies. The Varmint he might trust, but about others there was a fearful amount of risk.

The opportunity was too favourable to miss; and the Varmint could not be in the Furze Range to use it. Those were two well-ascertained truths. Was there any resource by which the plot could yet be carried to act? Yes, there was one. Wolsey might personate the Corunian, whose general appearance he was pretty well acquainted with, and destroy his enemy himself. There was a little more risk in this way of doing it; but suspicion would be thrown on the Varmint if anything should be seen, and Wolsey thought he was clever enough to get the Varmint clear after he should have allowed the public mind to settle on him as the murderer.

These dreadful imaginations were at work in Wolsey's mind at the time when Chatham went to condole with him, and saw the pistol-case. Wolsey had been seeing to the condition of his weapons, and considering whether he could skilfully use them on horseback. He cursed Chatham's stupidity for coming at that inopportune moment, and told him the story of Doris's engagement (with which he had not intended to distress him) as the only means he could readily think of for diverting attention from the firearms. The trick succeeded, as was seen. And, soon after Chatham's departure from him, Wolsey had finally determined to essay the adventure himself.

To make sure that Oakley had come over, he disguised himself and went and watched for him himself. Nor did the watch try his patience; for, punctual to the time arranged for his journey, Oakley showed himself on the road, wrapped in his stout pilot cloak, an unmistakable figure. "This has been a useful reconnaissance," thought Wolsey. "I know that he has come, and I know what he is like. He will be clever if he gets back again."

Sir Chatham Salusbury, when he left Miss Clowance's door that evening, was much stunned by the news which he had just heard from Oakley. If it had come from any less reliable

person, he would not even now have believed it. But it must be true, and he did not like it at all. It should make no difference in his proceedings, neither ought it to affect them, for there was nothing in the story to Doris's discredit. But he would still rather not have had things so. He was disappointed at having so imperfectly understood the girl, and he was sadly troubled as he rode away.

His groom perceived how absent in mind he was, and bethought him that this mood of his master—this unusual mood—was to him a gift of the fairies, one of those bits of luck that sometimes happen to lovers. For the groom also was in a somewhat anxious frame of mind. He had established a flirtation with a young lady in Veorse—no less a person than the daughter of Georgy Hoskin, the barber, of whom mention was made above. The lover did not choose to go and court at Georgy's house, making as though he were too fine a gentleman to visit at a humble abode. It is to be feared, though, that he had another reason besides grandeur. He had one or two sweethearts in London, he was befooling a housemaid at Traseaden Hall, and it never would have done to have a properly recognised attachment in Veorse. No, no; he knew better than that, and he kept clear of father and mother.

Miss Hoskin, however, who thought him the perfection of young men, quite believed that he was risking his caste by yielding himself a slave to her charms, and that she only responded properly to such august admiration by enjoying her lover's society far away from the contaminating presence of her kinsfolk. The result, in short, was that she met the groom always out of doors and in secret, he sending private advices to her when an interview might be practicable. He had, by a little girl belonging to some acquaintance of his in Veorse, sent a missive to the young lady apprising her that he was to be met with that Friday evening. But, as has been stated, torrents of rain were falling while Sir Chatham Salusbury was at Miss Clowance's house. As soon as it cleared, the groom had to get the horses ready for his master's return; but he felt that he had been exceedingly unfortunate in not being able to repair to the rendezvous when the rain slackened. He made sure that his sweetheart would be there, and that he would endanger the favour which he enjoyed with her if he failed to appear.

Moreover, this gallant man, who did not feel that he had as yet absolutely made prey of Miss Hoskin's affections, was himself a little weakly disposed, and very anxious to see the damsel, if it were only to exchange half-a-dozen words. He had been racking his brains for some excuse by which he might

be enabled to leave his master for a quarter of an hour, so as to gallop to the trysting-place and back again; but when he saw the anxious, preoccupied manner of Sir Chatham on mounting, he thought the best plan, after all, would be to take French leave, and to reserve excuses until his straggling should be detected. Accordingly, having taken note of the baronet, and observed that he rode with his head down, and appeared to notice nothing on the right hand or on the left, he decided that his employer was "habsent," and that he had probably been drinking at "the 'ouse where he'd been a stop-ping." Wherefore, after gradually increasing the distance between his master and himself, he struck into a cross road, and was soon on the ground which was to have been that of his interview with the young lady. He rode along the whole of the path which he had indicated without seeing anything like a petticoat, and then he turned about, saying that the wench was not so tightly hooked as he could have wished, or she would have been there. But before he had ridden much farther, he was sensible of a figure in a cloak in the darkness. Hereon followed greetings, colloquy, pleadings, arguments, and what not, the result being that the groom did not follow his master quite so quickly as he had intended.

Meanwhile Chatham, utterly regardless of what his man might be doing, rode forward in deep thought, trying to understand how the young and simple Doris could by possibility have passed through a love affair. He was soon outside of Veorse, and getting over the ground; but he only kept his horse at a walk, he was not inclined to rapid motion, and did not care to get home. About two miles out of Veorse, before arriving at the point where the road branches to Cookwort, the way descends into a hollow, and runs through a patch of open ground, dotted with furze bushes, the nearest hedges being a long way to right and left.

As Sir Chatham, still musing, was in this dell, a horseman emerged from the furze, and drew up to his side. Deep as was his reverie, he could not be unconscious of a mounted traveller being at his elbow. Possibly he thought it was his groom riding up; but that cannot be ascertained, for as he turned his head to peer through the darkness at the new-comer, the latter levelled a pistol at him, and fired. Chatham called out, "Ricketts, help! a highwayman!" and fell from his horse, which had already started off at the shot, and which now went galloping away in the night.

The man who had fired recognised the voice, and "Ricketts" as the name of the groom. He too, for a few seconds, was as

one who had been shot, for a horrible thought came across his mind. His first impulse, on recovering his wits, was to dismount and examine his victim; but as there came no further voice, he persuaded himself that excitement had made his senses play him false. He caught sound, too, of hoofs in the distance, and then put spurs to his horse, and was gone.

Ricketts, uneasy at having so long delayed with his sweet-heart, galloped past his fallen master without perceiving him. He concluded that the baronet must have pushed on faster than he (Ricketts) had bargained for, and accordingly he scarcely drew rein until he was in the stable-yard at Traseaden Hall. There he at once discovered that Sir Chatham had not returned, and sorely was he perplexed to account for this state of things, as also to devise an explanation of their having been separated.

"If he have took anything into his head upon the homeward road, and haltered his course," thought Ricketts, "he would ha' been sure to call me up. So he knows I wasn't within call. What the devil shall I say? That the horse shied, or I took the wrong way? No, he won't believe me. Damme, if I don't think I'll say I had a 'hencounter' with a 'ighwayman. It's known that the Corunian has been about these roads."

While he was thinking thus, he rode back to the main gate, where he heard a horse pawing and giving low affrighted neighs. This he soon ascertained to be the animal on which his master had ridden from Veorse. The man was greatly alarmed; and, no longer thinking wholly of himself, alarmed others.

They got lanterns, and went forth in three groups. "Not a word to Madam Salusbury," Ricketts had said before they commenced the search. "It may be some trifling haccident, and we mustn't cause alarm for nothing." While he said this his heart misgave him, for he knew well the horse on which Sir Chatham had been mounted, and was confident that he would not have left his rider on the road unless he had been badly frightened.

The search went on nearly all night, for when men are groping about with lanterns, and have no sensible method of conducting their search, they are often long of making a discovery, though they may not spare themselves trouble. In this case, moreover, the searchers had an idea that much might be done by listening, for the baronet, if disabled, would certainly be calling for help.

The day was breaking,—it was a dull, foggy, drizzling morn,—when one of the men descried a cloak on the ground; and then all was soon known as to Sir Chatham's fate. He was lying, shot through the head, and quite dead. The men, how-

ever, not certain that he was beyond help, raised him and bore him on their shoulders towards home. Not long after dawn, the body was in the mansion and laid on a couch. "Summon Mr Wolsey," was the word among them; but Mr Wolsey was not in the house. "We must have a doctor immediate," said Johnstone, the butler; and a mounted man was despatched for Mr Curtis.

CHAPTER VI.

BAFFLED INQUIRIES—A SOUVENIR.

As soon as Mr Curtis had decided that death had occurred some hours ago, he had the task of informing Mrs Salusbury of the dreadful occurrence. Meanwhile it was known throughout Veorse, immediately after the summons arrived for Mr Curtis, that Sir Chatham Salusbury had been found on the road with a bullet through him, and was probably dead.

Miss Clowance could hardly have believed, a year or two ago, that the death of any descendant of Sir Chesterfield Salusbury could have been a subject of much sorrow in her house; and yet she and her sister were conscious of being not only shocked, but also much depressed by the sad intelligence of Sir Chatham's fate. They had tried to like the young baronet; and once the old barriers were broken down, they received him into their favour, and had begun to look upon him as a relative. Doubtless, bitter disappointment was joined with their regrets; but they were not a complaining race, and they kept their mortification very much to themselves.

Yet there were plenty to interpret their feelings for them. Mrs Clack was either dead, or had retired from public duties, it is not remembered which; but the lady had plenty of successors, who, amid all the excitement of the news, and the guesses as to how the deed was done, found time to moralise on the persistent ill fate of the Clowances. Here had been Traseaden Hall ready, as it were, to fall into the possession of a niece of their house, and an envious destiny had snatched away the prize without a minute's warning, and contrary to everybody's expectation. Probably Miss Adair might now be glad to take up again with a young military man. She mustn't hope for another baronet.

As regarded the final severance of Traseaden Hall from them,

Dorothy and Eleanor, poor old ladies, could scarce help being of the same opinion as the gossips.

"I wonder," said Miss Clowance to her sister, when they were without other hearers, "whether Doris feels the blow severely. She is very reserved and self-controlled; yet I cannot help thinking that she was a little attached to the poor man."

"At the least," answered Eleanor, "Doris must feel by what a cruel chance she has missed becoming mistress of Traseaden Hall. Such a sudden crushing out of her hopes must be most distressing."

"Hopes of that kind," said Miss Clowance, "are better not entertained. They seem never destined to be fulfilled, and they lead to nothing but vexation."

"I will do you the justice, Dorothy, to say that you resisted for a long while the adoption of the aspiration which only yesterday seemed to be going to justify all who cherished it. I never will build castles again. It's no use. And yet, considering our old connection with Traseaden, it was not unnatural. Such a stroke is very hard, is it not?" and Eleanor sobbed.

"Let us consider," said Dorothy, "the vanity not only of the wishes we form, but even of the things wished for. They may not prove, when possessed, so fair as they seem to the eye of desire. We were not destined to have dear Traseaden; and it would have been better for us if we had reconciled ourselves to that decree long ago. Only sorrow has come of our hankering after the old place."

"But I can't utterly banish it from my mind. Can you, Dorothy? I won't hope any more; but, you know, regrets will arise now and then. Oh dear!"

Doris Adair was ashamed of herself for being able to feel any lightness of heart on so melancholy—so shocking—an occasion. She made herself reflect on all the horrors which had attended the dreadful event. The deceased had been their guest only last evening; he had come to them chiefly through admiration of herself; they were probably the last persons who had heard his voice ere he was so rudely snatched away. Then Doris thought of his bereaved mother and brother, and of the frequent visits of the dread visitor to Traseaden of late, and asked herself how any soul, with the ordinary feelings of humanity, could fail to be moved to pity and distress. The outcome of all which self-accusation and self-condemnation appears to be, that Doris *bon gré mal gré* felt her heart lightened of a dreadful apprehension. She was really sorry for the poor baronet's death, and sorry for the relatives whom he had left to mourn; but then the blow, the cruel award, which was to fall

upon her good aunts, had been dealt, had been pronounced, otherwise than by her. The great relief more than balanced the real regret which she felt, and she was, in truth, more cheerful.

Oakley's Saturday was spent very differently from expectation. He was summoned to Traseaden to give an account of his last interview with the baronet, Ricketts having stated that he spent the previous evening at Miss Clowance's in Oakley's company. Ricketts was considerably embarrassed in giving his evidence. It was clear, from the testimony of others, that he had left Veorse with his master, and yet that he had arrived at Traseaden alone, and without any knowledge of what had befallen,—at any rate, he was professedly without that knowledge. He was therefore straitly questioned as to how he became separated from Sir Chatham,—how he could have got so far to the rear as to admit of the baronet being killed with a pistol, and to have fallen dead on the road, without his being aware that any such catastrophe had happened.

"You know, my good man," said the coroner, who perceived that Ricketts was making a not altogether clean breast of it, "that your position is somewhat critical. You were the last person known to have been near the deceased; and, though your fellow-servants have testified that they believe your surprise and consternation to have been genuine, yet, in order that you may stand completely clear of all complicity in the murder, it is necessary that the jury should have a faithful and convincing account of all your conduct from the time of your leaving Veorse till your arrival at Traseaden."

Ricketts' heart gave a jump when he became aware that it might be possible to throw suspicion on him. He did not believe that any one would seriously suspect him. But it was awkward showing reticence on such an occasion, and yet he hesitated about owning to have failed to follow his master continuously, and especially about mentioning Miss Hoskin's name. He really didn't know, as he said; he didn't ride up close. It was a dark night, and he must have lagged more behind than he thought for.

"Now look here," said the coroner again, "you were mounted on a horse which you and others admit to be a good stepper. Men travelling in a dark inclement night do not usually creep along at a funeral pace. And yet, by your own account, you so lost ground that a murder was committed in your front without any sound of it reaching you."

"Well," said Ricketts, thus pressed, "I had an errand to do off the road a little outside o' Veorse. 'Tisn't nobody's business now. But I had, and that's how I lost ground."

"You had an errand; that is, as I suppose, your master sent you?"

"I didn't say 'xactly that. I had an errand."

"Did you go on your own business or your master's?"

"P'raps 'twasn't business at all."

"Whatever it was, I want to know whether your master sent you on it."

"Well, he didn't."

"You left him on business of your own? Now, you will soon see that it is necessary to state what the business was, because your absence certainly gave opportunity to a person to kill your master. Such opportunities are sometimes given by arrangement. I don't say that this was, but it will be for your interest to show that it was not."

"It doesn't signify to nobody what I went for. I went in to a cross lane as leads out of Veorse."

"I think it may have signified to some other person—one person perhaps."

The groom grew very red. "What's the use," said he, "of bringing up such matters? I own that I went away, and I hadn't ought, perhaps, to ha' done it."

"You will have to be much more particular than that. You spoke to somebody, probably, and we must know who it was."

Pressed in this way, Ricketts at last confessed the weakness of his breast. Miss Hoskin was summoned before the coroner, and bore witness that she had held a conversation with the groom when he ought to have been following his master.

Mrs Salusbury, in her sudden grief, much desired the presence of her younger son, who was unaccountably absent. It was supposed that he had gone on business to some place in the neighbourhood, and that he had decided not to return home in consequence of the inclemency of the weather. Without doubt the dread rumour of what had occurred would soon reach him anywhere in the Furze Range and scare him home.

Happily, Mrs Salusbury was not required to come before the inquest. There were others to identify the body, and to show when, and under what circumstances, the deceased had left Traseaden. But she had rallied her powers wonderfully after the first shock, and she was kept informed by Mr Curtis of the principal points that came out on the inquiry.

A little after Captain Oakley had given his evidence, he was surprised at the receipt of a small note, which, the liveried bearer said, was from Madam Salusbury. The note contained only two or three lines in the form of a question. "Are you

aware," it asked, "of any one in this neighbourhood who owes you a grudge or would wish to injure you?"

"By Jove," thought Oakley, "trouble has not taken her wits. It is as sensible a question as any that has been asked to-day. Had I been a resident here, I might really have feared that the shot was intended for me, seeing that the lamented baronet was habited just as I should have been if I had gone back."

He simply wrote on the same paper which contained the question the words, "No, I am not," and signed them with his initials. Then a little more light was cast on the subject by two men who had travelled on foot into Veorse the night before, and reached it somewhere about a quarter of an hour before Sir Chatham left it. Both deposed to having seen on horseback on the road a person whom they took to be the "Varmint" or "Corunian." When asked if they had observed this person with attention, they replied no, that they were only too glad to keep their distance from him, and to get away in a whole skin. But when they heard that the baronet had been shot, they immediately concluded that the Corunian must have had something to do with the deed.

Of course there was the possible construction that Sir Chatham had taken his own life; but, if so, the pistol would probably have been found near him.

After a somewhat lengthy inquiry, the jury came to the conclusion that the deceased had not taken his own life. They were further of opinion that Ricketts, the groom (whom they censured for having left his master), was not guilty of, nor implicated in, the murder. There was no evidence to connect the Corunian with the deed, although suspicion was rife that he would turn out to be the guilty person. And so the verdict of wilful murder was against some person or persons unknown.

Ricketts was cleared at some cost to his amorous plans, because Miss Hoskin was, after some pressure had been put on her, induced to confess that she had for some time past been the recipient of the groom's attentions. The admission of course aroused the wrath of his other favourites far and near, and he had a bad time of it.

It can well be imagined with what anxiety Wolsey Salisbury's return was looked for. Every minute it was expected that he would make his appearance; but the inquiry was concluded, and still he had not come. His mother, unhappy, restless, and in want of sympathy, went into his room during the inquest in hope of finding some sign of where he might be. She found nothing of that kind, but she observed that his pistol-case was not on the shelf where it usually lay, but in another

part of the room. On looking closer at it, she saw that its clasps were unclosed, which led her to open and examine it, and then she perceived that the pistols had been taken out. A horrible shudder ran through her at this discovery, which, however, she immediately suppressed by an effort. She had thought of questioning the servants relative to this; but after a moment's reflection she did not summon any one, but took the empty case to her own rooms and put it out of sight.

When it was known next day that Mr Salusbury had not been seen since his brother's death, and that nobody could conjecture what had become of him, the excitement redoubled, and Veorse was beside itself. The opinion, however, of those who could keep calm under such circumstances was, that Mr Salusbury's absence was simply an unfortunate coincidence, and that he would soon be back.

Inquiries were immediately set on foot into the recent movements of the Varmint. They did not bring much light upon the matter. The evidence, such as it was, regarding him, rather went to show that he had not been in the Furze Range for a week before. This was what he would have had people believe if he had been the murderer. He might, on a good horse, have gone to the scene of the crime and returned again after its commission without being observed by the persons who said they saw him continually. It would have counted for little against positive testimony to the contrary, but this was not forthcoming, the persons who had seen him, or his double, on the road, not venturing to give very decided evidence.

And thus things remained for several days, opinion inclining sometimes against and sometimes in favour of the Corunian, who, however, was less hardly judged after it became certain that the deceased had not been robbed, as nobody could suppose that he would have forborne to rob his victim after he had taken his life.

Miss Hoskin was so apprehensive of the effect which her clandestine engagement would produce on her friends, that she declared after examination that she couldn't go home; no, never, never; she should drop down whenever she crossed the threshold. She experienced some serious rebukes, it is believed; but she afforded a striking example of how side issues will sometimes affect a plain case. Georgy, her father, soon found that he could profess to have very superior information regarding Traseaden Hall, the murder, and the inquest, by reason of a member of his family having been undoubtedly present at the investigation. The very next morning he could not resist giving to all those whose noses and chins were subjected to his action, what he chose to call "all the particklers," establishing the cor-

rectness of everything he said by the remark, "My darter, you know, witnessed the whole perceedings. She were one of the principal evidences. Awkerd things these courtships when the public gets to talking about 'em; but we must put up wi' that for a bit. I b'lieve he's a steady young man, and like to make a good husband." When the old barber began to appreciate the importance which he thus gained, he was unable to view the error of his child so gravely as at first he had inclined to do.

The funeral took place as late as was possible, in the hope that Wolsey might follow the remains as chief mourner. But he appeared not; neither was any communication received from him. So his mother attended the funeral, to which came a large gathering of county people. Oakley was there, accompanied by Percival Clowance, who, after considering all the relations that had subsisted between the two families, decided on giving evidence, as it were, that the old feud was at an end. A week later there was an election of a member to serve in Parliament for the loyal borough of Caerlywmpthoedd, and there would have been an end of the world's concern for Sir Chatham Salusbury but for one circumstance.

That circumstance was that his only brother, the successor to his title and estates, had mysteriously disappeared on the night of the murder, and had not since been heard of. The missing heir kept alive the whole story, which excited very considerable interest far and near. Advertisements were issued, agents employed, and rewards offered, but without bringing to light the new baronet. It was not strange that many gossiping people should believe Wolsey to have been made away with on the same night as his brother, and his body to have been secreted. The idea now was that not robbery, but revenge must have incited the murderer; and that he must have been some one who owed a grudge to the whole race. Speculation, of course, began as to who would get the estates in case of the heir not being heard of within a reasonable time. The idea was that Mrs Dunstan, or Madam Salusbury, as she was generally called, would become mistress of Traseaden Hall; for everything about old Sir Wolsey and his will had been forgotten, except by a few old people.

The interest in the case had hardly begun to flag when Oakley, having completed the duty on which he had gone to Cookwort-in-the-Mire, returned to his wife and his ship. Only a day or two after his departure, the Clowance family were surprised by the arrival of a rather large packet, which a mounted servant in deep mourning left at the door. It was sealed with black seals, and addressed to Miss Adair.

This packet contained a letter from Mrs Dunstan Salusbury to Doris, a beautifully executed miniature of the late Sir Chatham, and a pearl necklace, very handsome, and to all appearance very valuable. The letter, though naturally sorrowful, was exceedingly kind. The writer, as it said, had been aware of the state of her lamented son's affections, and understood and felt deeply for the sorrow which his untimely and violent death must have caused in the breast of an amiable young lady with whom, to her great regret, she was as yet personally unacquainted. She hoped that some day they might cease to be strangers, although at the present time, while mourning the death of one son, and tried by the continued mysterious disappearance of the other, she was unfit for any society. She thought that the miniature enclosed might prove an acceptable present; and she besought Miss Adair to accept and wear the necklace, which for long had been set apart as a gift for her, in the hope that it might have been presented under far different circumstances.

Great was the commotion, as may well be supposed, which this packet caused in the house of Miss Clowance. The elder ladies were both delighted and chagrined: delighted, because it was now clear that Sir Chatham had been most sincere in his affection, since he had confided it to his mother; mortified, because now it was more than ever apparent by what a small distance they had missed the recovery of the inheritance on which their hearts were so much set.

"I am so pleased that she wrote so to you, my dear," said aunt Eleanor. "'Tis the only thing I know of that could at all have soothed our disappointment."

"You must write a grateful and a feeling reply," added aunt Dorothy. "Mrs Salusbury has behaved with extreme kindness, as we must admit. The present she has made is exceedingly handsome, and you must treasure it, and let her know that you set great value on it. Reply, too, very particularly to that passage in her note which speaks of our being hereafter acquainted, and say it will give yourself and your relatives pleasure to become known to a lady who has given such an earnest of her goodwill to us."

"But, aunt Dorothy, won't it be like deceit if I retain the necklace, and so let her suppose that I was ready to accept the poor baronet? I had thought of sending back the necklace, you know."

"If you had actually refused to marry Sir Chatham Salusbury," answered aunt Dorothy, "it would have been only right and proper not to accept a gift offered in ignorance of your

refusal. But you never did refuse him; you felt no unkindness toward him; and you never can be certain that if it did come to a proposal you would have been obdurate."

"Yes, aunt, I know."

"My dear, you may know what you intended; but you cannot possibly know how circumstances may have modified your intention. Besides, how can you possibly hurt Mrs Salusbury's feelings by saying now that you did not care enough for her dead son to have accepted him as a husband? You cannot do it. There is really no deceit in not contradicting her belief; and there would be a wanton aggravation of her distress in asserting your indifference."

"When she has given you such a lovely necklace," said Eleanor, "the return of it would be like rejecting her offer of friendship. I wouldn't have you do so for anything."

"She must think I had accepted him, or had been ready to accept him," answered Doris, "and there would be a sort of imposture in allowing her to remain under that false impression."

"I am sure you are wrong," Dorothy replied. "But we will ask your uncle Percival. I wish your uncle Felix also had been here to consult. The post would take six days in taking a reference to him and bringing back his answer."

The Reverend Percival, when asked his opinion, was not long in giving it. "We have no right," said he, "to assume that Sir Chatham Salusbury led his mother to believe that the facts were other than they actually were. She does not say that she believes him to have been an accepted lover, or that she feels sure that his offer would have been accepted. We are bound to believe that she knew the case, exactly as her son knew it, neither more nor less, and that without rushing at any conclusion, but just viewing things as they were, she found a pleasure in making her offering."

"She says distinctly," objected Doris, "that she had hoped to present the necklace under happier circumstances."

"*Had hoped*; yes," answered her uncle. "So, no doubt, she did; but she has nowhere said that the present was made contingent upon the hope being justified. I look at the case quite the other way. I take her to leave it (as it must ever remain) an uncertain matter how the baronet's proposal would have been received, but nevertheless for his sake, and in memory of him, to desire your acceptance of a free gift from his mother, which it is probably a solace to her to offer. I am sure that Sir Chatham was far from vainly confident himself; and I cannot imagine that he inspired a false confidence into his mother."

Doris here found herself in a minority. Nobody would agree with her that she ought to return the necklace; and when she reflected on how the refusal would affect Mrs Salusbury, she hardly perceived in what language she could fittingly express her rejection. Nevertheless, she was still unwilling to keep it, and sincerely wished that it had never been given to her. Possibly deep down in her breast, unacknowledged by herself, was a nearly strangled hope that L'Estrange might some day acquire her confidence again, and the necklace might be a dumb evidence that she had not been always constant; but this is only a guess.

A very proper and feeling answer was composed and sent, and the pearls were accepted.

CHAPTER VII

HASTY NEWS—A SUDDEN START.

It may have been two, or perhaps three, months after the presentation of the necklace that Oakley, who was now the father of a fine boy, came one day into the room where his wife, carefully shawled and screened, was sitting fast by the fire. He had come back from a cruise a day or two before, and he had gone on board that morning expecting to be fully occupied with his duties until after dark. Hence Una was a little startled when he appeared in the drawing-room not much later than one o'clock.

"Don't be alarmed, little wife," said the sailor as he entered, "there is nothing the matter in the world, as far as we are concerned; only I have heard something concerning other people which has rather surprised me, and which I thought I would come and talk over with you."

"You are sure that you are not preparing me for some unpleasant news, Felix?"

"The best way to reassure you on that point is to tell my news without further preface. You know about the mysterious disappearance of that last Salusbury baronet? Yes, of course. Well, I have received information which may help to clear up the mystery."

"*You* have received!" echoed Una. "How strange that it should have come to you! It seems as if our relations with that family would never end."

"Well, the destinies of the two houses do seem to intertwine a good deal; and, oddly enough, I am slightly drawn into this matter, not altogether because I have become in a manner a Clowance or a Deane, but owing to a passage in my life during the war in Spain."

"Indeed! and where is the lost baronet?" asked Una.

"He is, if my information can be relied on, in Paris under an assumed name. Why he is there, and why he has not communicated with his friends, is more than I can tell. But I will tell you how I came by my knowledge in the order in which things happened."

"Very well," answered Una, who now began to see that this was a matter which did not immediately affect them.

"It happened, then, that my clerk was at the Admiral's office this morning on business, when several official letters were handed to him for me; and after that was done, a private letter was shown to him which had come down under an Admiralty cover, with a minute requesting that it might be ascertained whether I was the Captain Oakley to whom it was addressed, as nothing was said about the ship. It had come to the Admiralty from the office of an army agent, who had written to say that he had been requested by an officer now in Paris to get it delivered as speedily as possible to Captain Oakley, R.N.; but as there were more than one captain of the name, and the agent did not know where to find either of them, he had taken the liberty to send it to the Secretary of the Admiralty. Now, in a corner of the letter were written these words: '*At San Sebastian about the time of the siege, I forget the name of his ship.*' My clerk said that he knew I had been on the coast of Spain towards the end of the war, and suggested that I had better see the packet, when I might possibly recognise the handwriting. Accordingly, he brought it on board, and took an opportunity of handing it to me."

"It was from an old friend, then?"

"You shall hear. I had very little doubt, when I saw the letter, that it was intended for me, there having been no other Captain Oakley at San Sebastian about the time stated; but I could make no guess at the writer. I thought I remembered Fred l'Estrange's hand, which, according to my recollection, did not resemble the superscription of the letter, and I could fix on nobody else who could be ignorant of my present address, could have been at San Sebastian, and yet have business with me. I hesitated about breaking the seal, saying that the remark about San Sebastian was an extraordinary one.

"'Rather Irish, sir, in truth, but yet,' and my clerk was

going on to add more, when suddenly it flashed across me that there was an Irish friend of L'Estrange living in the same quarter with him—a man as brave as a lion, yet in many things childishly simple. Conviction sometimes comes suddenly with irresistible force. I was certain that this was from L'Estrange's Irish Achates, and without further scruple I broke the wax, and soon satisfied myself that I had done right.

"Now, little Una, you shall hear the letter, and then you will know as much as I do. This is it:—

"DEAR CAPTAIN,—If you're not the man that went with Fred l'Estrange and me to look at the hornwork and the breaches after they were mended, and to examine the sites of the batteries on the Urumea, this letter is not for you at all, and ye'll be good enough to tear it up, or to burn it if ye like that better.

"But I think you are the very man, and if so, it's mighty strange that that baronet should have had your coat on when he was shot. And, well now, why am I writing about that baronet? but because I'm pretty sure that I've his lost brother under my eye, and you, being so intimate with the family as to be lending coats, might just tell his mother that he's dying, and if she wants to see him alive, she'd better start for this address like a trout at a May fly, or she'll maybe find him speechless.

"Now, you'd like to know how I came to drop upon this lost sheep. Sure, if he'd been a sheep I'd not have found him; 'twas because he was—but no matter for that. Ye see I was compelled to act in such a way that he'd have to ask satisfaction; and at the time when I was expecting a challenge, by George, I received a note saying that I'd been quite mistaken in him, that he was not the person he appeared to be, that he was ill and in great trouble, and that if I knew his history I'd pity him instead of wanting to fight him. He told me of a place where I might see him, and verify a good deal of what he said, and as I might justly doubt an invitation thus offered, I might come to him accompanied by a friend or by friends.

"Well, you see, the thing looked to me tolerably genuine, and I went and met him, when he assured me he was the victim of a great misfortune and mistake; and that he suffered so at times, that he was hardly in his right mind, and didn't know what he did. He was very poor and very ill. He begged me, instead of looking upon him as a bad subject, to befriend him as an Englishman, and he said he hoped to repay hereafter any kindness he might receive now.

"No matter what happened at that time. The important part is, that I had my eye on him, and he fell very ill—caught a devil of a fever, as well he might, living in such a slum, and wearing false hair and things. The devil a person he'd trust to do anything for him but me, and in looking out some papers at his desire, I found out who he was; do ye see? So, now, if you'd tell his mother he's dying, it would be a civility.

"Fred l'Estrange isn't with the army of occupation. He's got some staff appointment at home, and I haven't seen the boy since I don't know when. I'd like to see ye again if ye're the same. Do ye remember how stiff ye were with me when I said something about that Turk Trigor? Can't ye come over? Paris is delightful, and the claret superb. But somebody said ye were married. I'm sure it isn't true, for ye're too good a fellow entirely. And now, begging your pardon for troubling you, if ye're not the man,—I remain, ever yours sincerely,

"BAGENAL PERRIN."

"What an extraordinary production!" exclaimed Una, when the reading was ended. "Do you know anything about the writer? He seems to be doubtful to the end as to whether you do or not."

"Oh yes, I know him," answered Oakley; "and he's a man that anybody may be proud to know. He behaved on more than one occasion with conspicuous bravery. A good, warm-hearted fellow, although he doesn't express himself with remarkable clearness."

"He says he was a friend of that bad Colonel l'Estrange."

"He was a friend of L'Estrange, whom I cannot think of as 'bad.' I fancy I was that bad Captain Oakley once on a time."

"Never with me," said Una, emphatically.

"L'Estrange may answer all accusations some day, you know, and prove that he isn't 'bad.' For the present, I prefer to treat him as a person possibly not guilty."

"You have pleaded well for him," said Una; "let him be Colonel l'Estrange without the epithet. But now, what do you think about this discovery of Sir Wolsey Salusbury?"

"Well, that principally is what I came to speak to you about. Perrin, with all his harum-scarum manner, and his inexact style of writing, is not a man to be easily imposed upon with regard to anything important, and certainly not a man to wilfully deceive another. I am inclined to think that he has found the baronet."

"Really!"

"Yes, dear, really; and don't you see, didn't you remark, that he wants me to tell Mrs Salusbury?"

"Yes, how stupid! why could he not have written himself to her? It would have saved time."

"He probably did not know her address. My idea is that he remembered about my coat more distinctly than anything else about the story of the murder, and thought he would reach the mother through me more quickly than by any other channel that he could have chosen."

"Have you written?"

"No, I have not. I thought, you know, dear, that a poor woman receiving such a summons might have a thousand questions to ask which I could not possibly anticipate in a letter; and so, and so—believe me, it will be the greatest grief to me—I thought that I ought to get leave and travel to Traseaden Hall as fast as I can."

"And yet you told me when you came in that there was nothing the matter, as far as we are concerned. Now, you confess that you are wanting to go away, only two days after your return from sea," said Una, her eyes filling with tears.

"It is most unfortunate and vexatious, little woman; but think of this poor mother. She will want to know who this Colonel (I believe he is Colonel) Perrin is. She may not know how to get to Paris. She may not wish to have anything said at present about her son, and therefore may hesitate about consulting those about her. I am sure that you will, on reflection, see that I ought to go, however disagreeable the going may be."

"Yes, you must go," answered Una, becoming placid as of old. "You will not stay long?"

"The very shortest time possible. I will when there see the kind hearts in Veorse, and tell them what baby is like, but on any other account I will not delay a quarter of an hour."

"Are you not losing time now?" said Una, who, now that the parting was inevitable, was already reckoning the minutes that must intervene before re-union.

"Nay," Oakley said. "I have tried to avoid that. My application for leave has been sent by letter. An officer was the bearer, and he will have been performing his errand while I have been talking to you. He will be here with the answer in twenty minutes. Anticipating that my request will be granted, I have ordered a chaise to be at the door in half an hour from now. Let me go now and change my clothes for travelling apparel, and then I think I may get away with as little delay as was possible."

Una's heart chid her for supposing that he would have idled away moments after once determining to go. She rose now, all a sailor's wife, to aid in equipping him.

Exactly at the time expected, a lieutenant made his appearance with the permission to go. The chaise came punctually to the door. Oakley kissed his baby and his wife, who did not make a grievous parting more miserable by useless lamentations, and dashed away towards the Furze Range.

It was a long and fatiguing journey; but he stopped no longer than was necessary to change horses, getting what little refreshment he indulged in while the changes were being made. It was early in the forenoon when the chaise drew up at the door of Traseaden Hall. The place looked still and desolate. He had his card ready on alighting, and by the first servant that appeared sent it to Mrs Salusbury, with a message informing her that he was the bearer of an important communication. The only delay was that of a minute while he ascertained that the lady was at home.

"Be pleased to sit down, sir, for a little. Madam Salusbury will see you as soon as possible," was the answer which the man brought back.

It may have been ten minutes that he sat there alone. At the end of that time the door opened, not to admit Mrs Salusbury, but to admit a servant, who desired him to wait on the lady in another apartment.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SAD DUTY PERFORMED.

It was a spacious apartment into which Captain Oakley was ushered; but he was not for some time able to take note of its dimensions, by reason of the dimness which reigned in it. His sight accommodated itself a little to the gloom eventually, but the transition from a bright light prevented speculation for the minute, and he looked from side to side with purblind hesitation, unable to see the lady by whom he was received.

"I am at this end of the room, Captain Oakley," said a low but not indistinct voice. "I am sorry to receive you in so dark a chamber, but infirmity must be my excuse."

Oakley bowed in the direction of the voice, and then said,

"But for the errand on which I have come, and which I trust will excuse my conduct, I should feel intrusion on you, madam, to be unwarrantable. But I have a communication to make which you will, I am sure, consider important.

"Pray be seated," said the lady. "There is a large chair opposite me. Ah, you see it."

"Yes, I begin to see my way a little now. You know my name, madam, I think?"

"Oh yes. It is associated with recent crushing events. Oh yes, Captain Oakley."

"An officer, madam, now in Paris with the army of occupation has written to me, as to an acquaintance of past days, to desire me to communicate with you at once, as he believes himself to know much concerning your son, the present baronet."

An exclamation here from the lady, who seemed much affected. Then a pause. After that, she said, "Good heavens! My lost Wolsey! Oh, is it certain that he is in Paris?"

"It is certain that my correspondent believes him to be there."

"Is he about to return at last? Why does he not write?"

"I fear that he is unwell and unable to write. As I read Colonel Perrin's (my correspondent's) letter, Sir Wolsey Salusbury is not aware of the letter having been sent. Indeed, he would seem to have been concealing himself for some purpose."

"It is most extraordinary. And you say that he is ill?"

"Yes. Let me mention one or two circumstances explanatory of my acquaintance with the writer, and then you will soon understand all I have to tell. During the late war I commanded a brig which, just after the first siege of San Sebastian, was in the waters near the fortress."

"I attend," said Mrs Salusbury. "Pray go on."

"In one of our regiments, then lying close to the coast, there was an officer named L'Estrange, who had gone out to Spain in my ship. L'Estrange was hutted, or quartered, in the same building with this Colonel Perrin, who thus became acquainted with me. I have not seen him since those days, but he remembered me, was aware that I had been somewhere in the same neighbourhood as yourself; and as the readiest means he could think of, as I suppose, for advising you concerning your son, he wrote to me through the Admiralty. The letter found me at Plymouth, and I have hastened hither to explain matters in person."

"You have been exceedingly kind, Captain Oakley. I do not know how to thank you sufficiently."

"Do not mention my services, madam; but let me go on to

tell you that, after what I have said, you will be able to understand Colonel Perrin's letter, which I have brought for your perusal."

"You know the contents. You can spare my feeble eyes. Will you tell me?"

"Certainly, madam; though it is not a pleasant task. Colonel Perrin represents Sir Wolsey Salusbury to be extremely ill. His letter was written a week ago. He thought when he wrote that it would be well—he, of course, did not know of your severe indisposition—if you set off at once to the address in Paris which he has given. Even then he doubted whether you would be in time."

"Another blow! Oh, this is too dreadful!" said Mrs Salusbury. "But I will go—go at once. Nothing shall stop me."

"You feel quite able to make the journey, madam?"

"I will make it," said the lady with some decision.

"Pardon me, if I ask whether you have experience in travelling."

"I have some. Yes, I have enough for the occasion."

"And Paris; have you a knowledge of Paris?"

"Yes, I can feel my way. I speak French tolerably."

"How can I assist? I am much at your service."

"Thank you again. Thank you much for all your exertions in my service. You can do nothing more at present. I must at once set about moving. If you will leave me Colonel—the Colonel's letter, I will peruse it on my way. Let me now order you the refreshment of which you must be so much in need; and let me request that you will make Traseaden Hall your resting-place for as long as it may please you to remain in this neighbourhood."

"You are very good, madam. I would not, if things were otherwise, intrude in a house of mourning; but it happens that I have plenty of friends in Veorse—relations of my own and of my wife. These will expect me to stay half an hour with them, which is all the time I can command. This evening I set out again on my return journey."

"You allow yourself no rest," replied Mrs Salusbury.

"A sailor's life trains one to dispense for long periods with much rest. I shall accomplish my expedition without damage, I hope."

"Let me take your hand, Captain Oakley; and believe that I feel sincerely your kindness—your active kindness. I hardly dare think of the future. But a day may perhaps come when I may be able to show my gratitude."

As the interview had advanced, Oakley's vision had improved,

his eyes having accommodated themselves to the scanty light. By degrees he had perceived that Mrs Salusbury was lying on a couch. The poor lady was covered with shawls, so that he could not determine of what height she might be. Her mourning attire shrouded her quite up to the chin, there being a band of crape round her neck. On her head was a very plain white cap, with long ears, as if to protect her against cold. And projecting over her eyes was a long green shade, which, notwithstanding the dimness of the room, further protected them from the light.

To him she appeared to evince much incapacity; so much that, before many words had passed between them, he had mentally decided that for her to go to Paris was impossible. He was therefore greatly surprised when he heard her announce so positively that she would undertake and make the journey. There was never opportunity for much reflection; but at this passage in their conversation, he was not only surprised at her decision, but, as her voice became firmer with the excitement of deciding, she called up a recollection of somebody whom he had known or seen in former days. This memory, or fancy, was again stirred when she took leave off and dismissed him; but it passed away like a dream. He could make it take no shape whatever; and ere long he decided that it was some chance resemblance which had set him thinking, such as will be perceived again and again by persons who move much about in the world. It was not worth his while to be raking up all the minor incidents of his life in order to be satisfied of whom she reminded him.

"Of one of two things I am quite certain," thought Oakley, as he drove back to Veorse; "either the lady was not so ill as she seemed, or she'll never reach Paris. Possibly she is only nervous. I have heard that nervous people, though incapable of either bodily or mental exertion without a spur, can under excitement perform wonderful actions. This may be a case in point."

Oakley had travelled faster than the mail, therefore Una's letter announcing his departure for Veorse was yet some stages off when he drove into the town. So he sent a man up from the inn with a note explaining that he had arrived suddenly on business, and then showed himself after a convenient interval.

He did not tell what the business was which had brought him into the neighbourhood, but left it to be inferred that it was some duty, such as had before taken him to Cookwort-in-the-Mire. Seeing, then, that he had no particular domestic news to announce, the conversation was principally occupied by

the baby, concerning whom questions, pertinent and otherwise, were asked in showers. Not only his hair and eyes, and the mode of dressing him, were inquired into, but Eleanor desired particularly to know what profession he would follow, and whether he would have a genteel figure.

The opportunity was not, however, lost of laying fully before Oakley what had occurred about the necklace. He quite approved of Doris having accepted it; and he took advantage of that turn in the conversation to ask what kind of woman Mrs Salusbury was in appearance. Strange to say, none of his relations had ever seen her. They had heard from the late baronet that she was graceful and active; other testimony had informed them that she was clever and agreeable; but, of course, a poor soul afflicted as she had been lately could not be very vigorous nor very bright. There was little to be learned about her from this quarter.

Then there was a regular storming of the poor man to make him name a time when Una and the boy could come to Veorse and be petted.

"Our dear little nephew!" said Dorothy and Eleanor; "what a delight it will be to have an infant in the house again! There has been none since Doris was a baby."

"My dear little cousin! how I shall dote upon him!" said Doris, who was beginning the *rôle* of a blighted heart, and looking to the children of others as the only objects of interest that could henceforth exist for her.

There was not much difficulty in making a satisfactory arrangement. Una, he thought, would soon be strong again, and he knew of no obstacle but the season to her soon making the journey. But difficulties of this kind were by acclamation overruled. There was not a warmer house in the kingdom than theirs. A whole floor should be at Una's disposal. They would be responsible that no mischief should happen from cold. And so it was arranged that, before Felix's ship should again weigh for a long cruise, Una and her boy and his train should be transferred to Veorse. It was tantalising that Felix's visit should now be so short, so momentary, as they might say, but a moment's sight of him was better than none at all.

So Oakley took leave, and with much rapidity, and without adventure, made his way back to Plymouth, to the great delight of his wife, who admitted that he had been more than punctual as to his promise of return.

"I was not certain all along that I should keep faith with you so accurately," said the husband. "When I saw the condition of that poor woman, it seemed to me that unless she

should declare herself to be absolutely unable to move at all, I must escort her at least as far as Calais."

"You never thought of such a thing!" said Una, turning pale at the idea. "You remembered what the Irishman told you about the claret," her remarks contradicting each other.

"She absolutely decided to take care of herself, at any rate. She may be with him to-morrow. I hope she may be in time to find her son alive. But if he were really dying when Perrin wrote, all must have been over many hours since. However, she may have the sad satisfaction of learning the particulars of his end, and perhaps of penetrating the mystery of his disappearance."

Una did not speak again immediately. When she did, "I was just thinking," said she, "that three successive baronets will have died within the year. Is it not strange? And now who will inherit the title?"

"I really don't know. Somebody, when we were talking about the family in the Furze Range, said that, in the last century, the title had passed to a distant cousin for lack of a lineal descendant of the man who died. Of course there may be more cousins who are derived from some of the older baronets, but failing such, the title will be extinct."

"And there will be an end of the line. I really shall not be sorry, for they brought much sorrow to our house. But what about Traseaden Hall? that cannot be extinct."

"No," said Oakley, "it will depend on the wills of the two last owners—I suppose they made wills—who is to have it. I should imagine that Mrs Salusbury would have it for her life at any rate."

"Then there will be another widow in possession of it. If only now there were an unmarried Deane, who could win the widow's good graces, it might be got back again, and the old prophecy fulfilled. You know, don't you, that it is to be brought back by a female into possession of our house? I thought at one time that dear Doris would have fulfilled the prophecy."

"No, don't talk that way, little wife. If you had seen how broken the poor mother appeared, you could not make jokes about her marrying."

"I am sorry," said Una. "We will not joke any more. Baby must be awake; shall we go and see him? And so you really settled that the shore part of the family should go to winter at Veorse?"

"Positively. I'll see you safe there. And I quite agree with the good souls in the house that you'll be happier, and do better there than you could anywhere else. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do," answered Una. "Now that it is decided, I think I shall be glad to go. But come now to the nursery."

Whereupon Captain and Mrs Oakley repaired to the fane in which the infant heir of Oakley was principally worshipped, and which was the seat of government of that house, though the little inmate was as yet unconscious of exercising a tyranny. There they dandled the small potentate, and heard him attempt to crow, were quite certain that they detected signs of consciousness and recognition in his looks, decided for the hundredth time from whom he inherited his not very clearly cut features, heard him wail, soothed him, witnessed the taking of his meals, and saw him, after that operation, sink off into slumber.

This pleasantly and exactly filled up time to the hour when a midshipman generally came in with despatches, if the Captain happened to be on shore. To-day there was a despatch of some consequence, because it told Oakley that his ship would probably not leave harbour for about a fortnight, at the end of which time she would be employed on a duty of some duration.

"This, then," said he, when he had communicated the contents to Una, "fixes our plans to some extent for us. In a week or so we must start for old Veorse. Will you write and tell them so, my little Una?"

CHAPTER IX.

AN HEIR FOR TRASEADEN.

Captain Oakley generally looked ahead so cleverly at all times, that it is unnecessary to tell how, now that he had to take thought for his wife and child, he planned the whole of the journey with wonderful forethought, smoothing, as far as human wit could do it, every apprehended roughness, arranging their halting-places most conveniently for the small idol, and dividing the journey so that its mother might find it a diversion rather than a fatigue. These preparations, then, may be supposed without telling; but not so every incident of note that occurred previous to the journey, because just as they were about to set off, when baby, fully accoutred, was laid on a bed for a last minute, while nurse put on her bonnet, there came a double rap at the street door, and a postman put into Oakley's hand (who was standing in the passage, ready to hand Una

into the carriage) a letter with the Paris post-mark, and addressed in Colonel Perrin's writing, but this time correctly to the ship. Oakley, on obtaining his leave, had made arrangements with the post office for having every despatch so addressed delivered at his house.

"This will just do," said he, "to read as we roll along. I am quite curious to know about the baronet and his mother. Now, then, nurse. You get in first. Give me the youngster till you are seated, and then I'll hand him in."

With the cockswain there to superintend the start, and a couple of the gig's crew to stow away the innumerable small stores laid in for Master Oakley, the expedition was soon under way. Oakley looked into every pocket and recess to see that nothing had been forgotten, and then, finding that everything had been provided, and that all was ship-shape, he drew Perrin's letter from his pocket and broke the seal. He read—

"DEAR CAPTAIN,—Sure, he was the baronet, and the devil a doubt about it. I thought I'd not mislead ye, but his mother knew him, and of course she couldn't be deceived.

"Ye've seen the accounts in the newspapers. I didn't write them, and had no hand in them, and I daresay they're all right; but that isn't just the way that I should have related the story. However, no matter.

"She told me how kind ye'd been, and that you'd gone all the way from Plymouth to see her yourself, and that if ye hadn't managed matters that way, she doesn't think she'd have been in time to see him alive. Now, isn't it queer that she doesn't take home the body? I wanted her to, and said he ought to be laid by the side of his brother, who wasn't a twin, I find. But she said, 'No;' and she's one that knows her own mind, I can tell ye. So the funeral is all over, and took place here. I attended—sure, how could I do less?—and the doctors and some diplomatic people. There was a notary too, who was employed about the identification, as they call it.

"She would have written herself, but what with business and tribulation, she isn't equal to it, and she bade me do it for her. She's affable sometimes; and she told me a little ago that there'd be no baronet, the heirs were all worn out (no wonder, at the pace they've been going); and as to the property, it would depend upon what wills might be found. So everything about that must be mentioned under reserve, as they call it.

"She says you *are* married. How I hate myself for saying those humbugging things in my other letter. Of course it was

all a pleasantry. But not about the claret. The claret is a fact, upon my honour, and the invitation holds good, if ye'd fifty wives—I beg your pardon again, 'twas only a figure of speech. But ye must come. Sure, don't I adore the sex, and wouldn't I be the last man living to deride them in earnest! And we must find some way to make the life pass pleasantly. The fighting's all over—worse luck; and betimes one's damned stupid and bedevilled without an intelligent companion. I wish Fred l'Estrange was here. He's not married, nor likely to take to that life, I am told. Do ye remember, Captain, that little embarkation he and I effected on board the—the—your ship, ye know? Ah, ye do! It makes me melancholy to think of it, for there's no adventure to be met with now. And, sure, I oughtn't to be saying that at all, for ain't I here now, sound wind and limb, and I got a bad cut or two in the Pyrenees.

“Only come, and we'll enjoy ourselves. The French officers were troublesome at first, but they've been brought to reason. Two of them I myself convinced, one in the arm, the other in the groin; thank God, it was all done without manslaughter on either side! Just send a note by one post before, lest I should be going out of the way; but for that, ye may drop in, in the most unpremeditated manner, on, yours truly,

“BAGENAL PERRIN.”

“Sir Wolsey Salusbury is dead,” said Oakley as he finished the letter.

“It was to be expected,” Una answered. “Was his mother in time to see him alive?”

“She was. You had better read the letter, and you will know as much as I know—rather, you will form your own conclusions from what is certainly not a very clear epistle, and yours may be different from mine.”

“Is it so quaint?”

“Rather so. But as you read imagine, if you can, that Colonel Perrin is talking to you in a rich brogue, and you'll be more likely to take in the sense.”

Una laughed over the Spalpeen's letter. “Have you seen any newspaper accounts?” she asked.

“Certainly not. I have been busy about other matters, and have not had time for newspapers.”

“They will have seen the story at Veorse, and we shall hear all about it when we arrive. And they're not going to bring the body to lie with the rest of the family?”

“It appears not. To say truth, my sense of propriety is not

much outraged by the body remaining in France. I had not a very high opinion of the deceased."

"Well, don't speak ill of him now. And what was the embarkation that Colonel Perrin and that—and Mr l'Estrange effected on board the *Aiguille*?"

"Oh, that was an odd story, and has to do with L'Estrange's supposed perfidy. L'Estrange fought a duel about a lady, and it was this very lady, Madame Valdez, that the friends smuggled off to the *Aiguille*. I brought her home."

"Then you knew her. What was she like?"

"A very bright, pleasant woman, who had seen a great deal of the world. Good figure, remains of beauty, accomplished, fine hair still, and a voice that makes you think of—by Jove, that is the voice that has been puzzling me these months."

"How? What do you mean, Felix? Why do you exclaim that way?"

"It was nothing. Don't mind it. It only flashed across me that a voice which I heard a little while ago, and which seemed familiar, though I couldn't remember where I had heard its like, was the double of Madame Valdez's."

Hereupon the Captain became pensive. The remainder of the journey furnished no matter worthy of note. It was accomplished in safety, time was kept very well, and Una, looking fresh and lovely, was once more in the old house, where she had experienced so much trial and so much happiness, and in the arms of her relatives; and the most wonderful baby that ever was produced in ancient or modern times (which, of course, means before or since Adam) was praised and glorified as a perfect whole, and in all his parts, and in all his attributes. It took at least a week to discover his various merits; and when that was done, predictions of his great future were entered upon, and these were far from being exhausted when another week had passed.

It is not for a moment pretended that the baby Oakley engrossed attention to the utter exclusion of every minor subject. People had to eat and to look to the vulgar requirements of life; it was, moreover, in common courtesy imperative that civil questions should be answered, and information afforded on different tiresome points. But matters which, at another period, might possibly have been judged to deserve attention, and even to be of interest, were now considered profane, and if possible subjected to the taboo. Hence it was some days before Oakley could conveniently introduce the subject of Sir Wolsey Salusbury's death. The first two or three times that he spoke of it, the answers, after beginning in a relevant manner, suddenly

glanced off, and directed themselves to the great centre of interest towards which every speech and every idea was irresistibly attracted. But at length, through importunity, and by no means because he was other than tedious, but rather to have done with his interruptions, and clear the board for legitimate and improving discourse, somebody deigned to tell him that the 'Growthamshire Gazette,' as well as the London papers, had contained a paragraph setting forth that it was understood that on the night when his brother was murdered, Sir Wolsey's life also had been attempted, but that by consummate address he had contrived to induce his enemies to spare his life, on condition, however, that he should immediately betake himself abroad and live in seclusion until all inquiry concerning the events of that night should have subsided.

He had accordingly fled to Paris, where, acting entirely and most honourably up to the engagement that had been forced on him, he assumed a fictitious name, and even descended to very humble industry to eke out a living. While so subsisting, he had been attacked by epidemic disease, which, together with the distress of his mind from family affliction, and from the degrading situation to which he was reduced, proved too much for his constitution, and finally destroyed him.

He would have died without his real name or rank being discovered, had it not been that an English officer, whose admiration and esteem he had attracted by his simple manners and high principles, when tending him in his sickness, came upon some tokens which revealed his name and standing in society. The officer, once that he in some sort comprehended the matter, lost no time in communicating with the baronet's family, so that happily his mother was at his bedside at the time of his death, and a complete identification of him under his proper designation was effected.

The baronet's bodily state had been latterly so feeble, that it was impossible to lead him to speak of the awful pressure under which he had left home and property, and consented to live as an obscure person. It will probably be very difficult now, if not impossible, to trace and expose the infamous conspiracy of which he is supposed to have been the victim. The few facts which lead to the supposition are known only to his mother and to some friends. His sad story is a romance of real life.

Oakley knew enough about the last deceased baronet to make him doubt very much the colouring, if not the groundwork, of the above narrative. He was, however, not in a position for contradicting any of its facts, and so he wrote to Perrin thanking him for his letter, showing him why he could not just

then go to Paris, as he was in command of a ship, and expressing sympathy with Mrs Salusbury. As he wrote he thought of the energy to which that poor lady could by suffering be wrought up, and reckoned it not impossible that she might even now have returned to Traseaden. If so, it would only be a proper attention that he should offer to see her again, in case she should have anything to communicate with reference to their former interview.

This idea, though it did not quite leave him, was not very lively within him,—that is to say, it was kept down for a day or two by thought of domestic matters. When it did occur, Oakley put it aside by saying to himself, "Well, I must find out whether she's come back." And he did ask about this from persons who were likely to be informed on the subject, but one said Yes, another said No, and he could not feel certainty about the matter. Then he determined to take a walk to Traseaden Hall—it was beautiful weather for walking—and ask the question there. He would take Doris thither for a walk, as it was much too far for Una. But various matters came in the way, and it was yet a day or two more before he could carry his plan into execution. When at last he was quite free on a fine morning, it appeared that there was to be that day an exhibition of his heir to some friends specially invited to it by Doris, so the young lady could not accompany him. As his stay was limited, there was therefore nothing left for him but to seize the occasion and go alone.

And he went. It was not cold enough to make rapid motion imperative, so he took things leisurely, admired the prospects more than he had ever had time to do since his school-days, and particularly noted all the points connected with the murder of Sir Chatham Salusbury, the side road along which the groom had deserted, the spot where it was reported that the Corunian had been seen on the night of the outrage, and more particularly the place where the body was found. "It still strikes me as possible that the shot was intended for me," he said to himself, "and there is at least one other person who has, or has had, an idea of the same kind. I cannot imagine how it could be so; and I trust such a suspicion may not be generally talked of, or it will keep Una anxious as long as I am in the neighbourhood."

In this way he was some time in reaching the entrance gate of Traseaden Hall, and he was a little tired, not having done much walking lately except on the quarter-deck. As he entered the grounds he saw one who, from his dress and mien, appeared to be a gentleman, engaged apparently in taking in the scope

of the park, as he was walking hither and thither, and turning as if to note points in the boundaries, like one accustomed rapidly to estimate areas.

"Ha!" thought Oakley, "this looks like a change of ownership, or preparation for something of the sort. Now, this man will know very well who is at the Hall, so I'll put the question to him. If she should be still absent, this course will save my going on to the door, and I shall be glad to escape it, as the walk home will quite satisfy me."

He made for the path of the inspecting gentleman, who, however, was so much engaged in his observations that he was not conscious of any one being near until he was spoken to.

"Permit me to ask you, sir," said Oakley, "whether Mrs Salusbury has returned from Paris to the Hall?"

The other, thus addressed, collected his ideas from his survey, and turned calmly round so that he and Oakley were face to face.

"Oakley!"

"L'Estrange!"

burst simultaneously from their lips after they gazed for a moment at each other.

They had taken hands kindly before either remembered that he had ought to complain of in the other. But the unpleasant recollection came, and with it a certain awkwardness in commencing conversation.

Oakley was the first to recover himself. "How strange," said he, abating something of the warmth of his first manner, "that we should meet here, and in this way!"

"Strange indeed! Five days ago I had not an idea of being now in this neighbourhood, and now it seems my lot to spend the rest of my life here, or a good portion of it."

"Indeed," answered Oakley, who concluded that this was an allusion to matrimony, the scene of which, as he thought, L'Estrange would have shown better taste in laying somewhere else.

"You turn cold," said L'Estrange. "I cannot do so. The sight of you has called up all the most agitating thoughts that my breast ever knows. I am not resentful—you see I am not; but I must ask you why you wrote so frigidly, so cruelly, and why you would not answer my letter of explanation?"

"My dear sir," said Oakley, "your question perplexes me. It appears to me that there is great misapprehension somewhere. I do not remember to have written to you in a manner deserving the epithets which you have used; and I am certain that, since we parted in Spain, I have never received from you a letter of explanation."

"I addressed, as you directed, to the Portuguese house, and I lost no time in replying; therefore I could not imagine that you had not got my answer," replied L'Estrange, who never doubted yet that Oakley's memory was somewhat confused.

"That confirms me in what I said," returned the sailor. "I might have erred as to having written a letter, but most assuredly I never requested you nor anybody else to write to me to the care of a Portuguese house."

"It is by the merest accident that I have not your letter in my pocket," said L'Estrange. "I was careful on coming into this neighbourhood to bring it with me, and it is now at Mathwick, where I slept last night. For reasons which you will readily understand, I did not go to Veorse. I wish very much that you will let me show you the letter."

"By all means," answered Oakley; "the thing will be readily done. You have made me feel quite curious to know what this composition of mine can have been which so distressed, or, should I rather say, surprised, you."

"No, distressed is the right word. A much stronger might be used. But, to prevent any further misconception as to a matter which makes me feel acutely, I will say no more concerning it until you have seen the document."

"You are then making some stay in this neighbourhood? I think I understood you to say so."

"My present stay was to have been very short. Had I not met you, I should have gone away to-morrow; perhaps I yet may be able to do so. But pardon my changing the subject for a moment. There is a question which I am most desirous of asking you, though I cannot put it without dread. Ever since I recognised you it has been pressing, as it were, to my tongue."

"You will, I am sure, ask me no question to which I can object. I can hardly suppose that I should not feel at liberty to answer any that might come from you."

"Is Miss—Miss—Miss Adair married?" The poor fellow could hardly utter the words. His accents were most pitiable. His countenance worked so that Oakley could not bear to look at him, nor refrain from replying in a somewhat softer tone than he thought strictly appropriate.

"Miss Adair is not married," said he. "I saw her only two or three hours ago, and but for an accident she would probably have accompanied me hither."

"What!" exclaimed L'Estrange, in a tone of excitement. Then, instantly lowering his voice, he added sadly, "A fortunate accident, probably."

Seeing how much the soldier was affected, Oakley tried to lead the conversation into another channel by saying, "I was delighted to read of the laurels which you won at San Sebastian. A terrible business that assault. You earned your promotion, if ever a man did."

"If you only knew how little satisfaction I have derived from success! The chief value that I set upon credit or rank was that they might procure me a happiness which had formed the lode-star of my life. When they came the star set, and I have been desolate ever since. But I talk too much of myself. You, too, have been distinguished, and that in command. I read the brilliant achievement of the little Aiguille with the highest satisfaction. It was a glorious action. After your glory you obtained the desire of your heart."

"You know that I am married?"

"Certainly. When I show you your letter, you will understand how I know it."

"I came hither," said Oakley, "to find out whether Mrs Salusbury had returned from France. They could not tell me in Veorse."

"I understand," the other said, "that she will be here to-morrow."

"Did you happen to hear whether she had succeeded to this property? It was to depend on her sons' wills, I was told."

"No, I think she has not succeeded."

"Really! Have you heard, then, who will be the future owner of Traseaden Hall?"

"I have been assured that I am the owner."

"You!"

"I don't wonder at your astonishment. Mine was equally great a few days since. It has subsided a little now. I ought to have told you this before; but there was and is something nearer my heart than Traseaden."

"Dear me! Has the estate been left to you?"

"In a manner, yes. That is to say, it was left, failing heirs of the other branch, to my grandmother and her heirs. I am her only descendant, and am told that my right is indisputable. My grandmother was sister of the late Sir Chesterfield Salusbury. The property was entailed on her and her issue after Sir Chesterfield's line, which appears to be now extinct."

"And you have all along been heir of entail to this property?"

"I believe so. But I knew nothing of my chance of inheritance; indeed, until a week or two since the chance was so small as to be hardly worth knowing. But strange things

come about. My grandmother was twice married. The will mentions her by the name of her first husband, who was not my grandfather, and who died childless. The inheritance descended to her daughter (my mother), who of course changed her name when she married. So the pedigree was not very obvious to those who did not seek for it."

"It was fortunate that your rights were recognised."

"I received my information from the late Sir Chesterfield Salusbury's family lawyer, in whose office, as I am now told, the will of a former Sir Wolsey Salusbury was engrossed. So startling a piece of intelligence brought me at once to Growcester, from whence the letter was dated. I was soon satisfied of the soundness of my claim, and am about to return to my duty for the present, but thought I should like, before doing so, to see the estate of which I had so unexpectedly become the possessor. With what different feelings should I have regarded this change of fortune if my hopes in another quarter had not been blasted!"

They now recurred to Oakley's letter, which L'Estrange was impatient to produce. Oakley said that he would have at once accompanied L'Estrange to Mathwick, only that he feared his not returning punctually to dinner might alarm his wife. But he saw no reason why, after he had shown himself at the family board, he should not drive to Mathwick that evening. It was agreed that he should do this, and as the present parting was not to be for long, it was effected without many last words. Each of them went his way charged with weighty subjects of reflection.

CHAPTER X.

EXPLANATIONS.

So many considerations arose out of his interview with L'Estrange, and the interview was so unexpected, that Oakley, who generally kept his ideas well assorted, was conscious of a tumultuous chaos in his brain, which he had some difficulty in reducing to order. L'Estrange the lord of Traseaden Hall! And how this property and its disposal seemed to be evermore gravitating, as it were, towards some person in his wife's family, never forming an actual junction, but always thrown off again by some adverse fate. This curious succession of L'Estrange

showed plainly enough once more how easily and naturally the reunion might have come about ; but then there was that cross accident of Madame Valdez, which made the approach to coalition only a mockery. And so it always was ; the main circumstances looking beyond expectation favourable, and then the whole scheme dispersed by one irresistible mischance !

Then he remembered that L'Estrange had sent him a letter of explanation. It may have been a lame or an insufficient explanation, still the accused had something to say for himself, and chose to say it. The emotion, too, which L'Estrange had shown during the interview could be interpreted only as meaning that he was still attached to Doris.

Again, there was the curious story (in telling which he believed that L'Estrange was quite sincere) about a letter having been received from himself, and about his having desired to be communicated with through a Portuguese firm. Concerning this he was thoroughly puzzled.

His walk home gave him time to sort these thoughts a little, though not to calm down the excitement which they caused. One conclusion to which he came was that, until after his coming interview, he must keep his meeting with L'Estrange a secret ; and the secrecy added to the disturbance in his mind. If he could have talked the strange things over with some of his familiars, it would have relieved him.

He managed well enough to avoid creating suspicion that anything of importance had occurred to him, though, in order to do so, he had to keep a continual guard on himself. He told the party that Mrs Salisbury had not returned, but he had ascertained that there was a person at Mathwick who could give good information concerning the disposal of the property. "I think," he added, "that, as we dine pretty early, I shall drive over after dinner and get my inquiries answered at once. There is no wisdom in postponing anything when one has so little time." There was a general murmuring at this, but he managed to soothe it ; and then Una declared that, as he was going to drive, she would accompany him, and there was some diplomacy necessary to put her off. He had her sisters, however, entirely with him when he talked of possible detention to a late hour, of cold, and of fatigue. Mrs Oakley yielded, though not with a good grace. And all obstacles being now cleared out of the way, the Captain started in good time, and leaving no suspicion behind him that his journey meant more than had met the ear.

As soon as L'Estrange had ascertained that Oakley would take no refreshment after his drive, he lost not a moment in

placing before him the letter which he had received when on the Pyrenees, the source of many months of anguish to him. "There," he said, "is the document of which I spoke to-day. I think it will stir up your memory."

Oakley took the letter, read it carefully, and examined its penmanship and form.

"It stirs up nothing," answered he, "but my amazement. The writing might be my writing, I admit. Had the subject been an indifferent one, it might have deceived me and caused me to blame my memory. But, without hesitation, I say that I never wrote this letter, that I was never authorised to write a letter of that tenor, and that I never in my life desired any communication intended for me to be addressed to Enriquez and Co. This is a forgery."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed L'Estrange, upon whom an awakening thought had come like an electric shock. "Then the enclosure may have been a forgery too."

"Was there an enclosure?" asked Oakley. "Oh yes; I see I am made to say so."

"An enclosure which has been the misery of my life ever since I received it. It was from Miss Adair, discarding me, destroying me."

"I can say, on the moment, that Miss Adair never, at the date of this, wrote you any letter at all."

"What!" said L'Estrange; "my punishment an unreality! my happiness still possible! Doris still——"

"Calm yourself, and be good enough to listen," said the sailor. "I said, and I say again, that I am certain that no letter was written to you by Miss Adair. As to your punishment, or what you call so, being unreal, that is quite a different thing."

L'Estrange groaned. "Go on," said he.

"My certainty," added Oakley, "about this letter and the one enclosed in it not having been written by those who appear to have signed them, arises from the fact that there was a discussion among some of Miss Adair's friends as to the course to be pursued towards you; and it was decided that no one should write to you. Percival Clowance will remember this as well as I do. But although all idea of writing was dismissed, there was a strong feeling (founded, of course, on testimony) that you had been fickle, that you had been unfaithful to Miss Adair,—nay, pray hear me out,—and that you should be considered as having forfeited the good opinion of every member of the family. Miss Adair distinctly declared her renunciation of you. To the best of my belief, then, though some designing

person has deceived you as to her action, you still lie—justly lie—under her irrevocable displeasure.”

“And you are certain that you never received my explanation?”

“Quite certain. The explanation which you may have sent fell probably into the hands of whoever forged my signature and wrote in my name.”

“Then my case is not hopeless. I have yet to be heard in my defence.”

“That is so. Your silence and your non-appearance were taken to imply that what was said against you was correct.”

“Give me a moment,” begged L’Estrange, “to collect my thoughts, in order that I may say what has to be said as briefly as possible.”

After a pause, he went on.

“It is clear that the whole misunderstanding has arisen out of that unfortunate affair of Madame Valdez, whom you took home at my request.”

Oakley made a gesture of acquiescence.

“You know that Madame Valdez is an Englishwoman, I suppose. Well, according to her account of things, she is my father’s sister. I do not admit the claim. I do not even believe that she is my grandfather’s daughter, but rather that she is the daughter of a wife whom my grandfather divorced, and that she was born a year or two after the divorce. In that case, she cannot be a relation of mine. Nevertheless, it was as a near relation—as my aunt—that she claimed my protection.”

“God bless me!” put in Oakley; “I am astonished.”

“She did not, I perceive, when on the sea, tell you of her claim of kindred. The woman is full of schemes, and may have judged it desirable to say little about her own connections when on board of the *Aiguille*. Let me say, however, most distinctly and unreservedly, that there never was anything in the way of love-making between her and me.”

“Your duel?”

“Yes, I have seen it all since. I was foolishly reticent, I know. I may have been right in refusing any answer to the Portuguese officer, whose interference was purely impertinent. But certainly I should have taken my friend Stanshon into confidence. He nettled me a little by some remarks which he made; and I, feeling strong in my integrity, and never imagining how vitally this matter could injure me, would make no explanation. The story of the Portuguese marquis, if not a wilful untruth, is certainly a most mistaken one. Perrin could tell you——”

"Ah, Perrin," interrupted Oakley; "why, only the other day—but no matter, I am all anxiety to hear you further."

"Well, I have little more to tell. One day, one miserable day, in the Pyrenees, I received the letter which you repudiate, and with it the other letter to which I have referred, and which crushed all the spirit out of me. I may honestly say that I have never had a happy day since, and that even the estate which has so strangely come to me, has brought with it more regrets for the blessing which it *might* have been, than gratification."

"It is a web of mysteries and surprises," said the sailor. "Whoever could have thought of writing such a letter as this as from me? Whose purpose could it have served to do so?"

"It must have been some one who knew your handwriting well, and had the skill to imitate it."

"Yes, I cannot in the least understand. Perhaps we may never penetrate this mystery; but, in order to clear your case, it is only necessary to find the Senhora Valdez. Now, I have an address which, as she said, would find her some little while ago, and which probably might guide us to her now."

"While you have been speaking," L'Estrange said, "a suspicion has come to me that this woman may know all about these forgeries. Why they were committed, I have no more idea than you have. But I know that Madame Valdez was very clever in certain ways, and that she was acquainted with many other people remarkably well versed in the arts of deceit. Her success as a purveyor of military information was in a great measure due to her knowledge of such matters."

"Still, there must be a motive for such crimes as these, and we are yet without suspicion of a motive which could have led Madame Valdez to such villany. By the way, would not the family inquiries which have been made to secure you the property tend to throw light upon who Madame Valdez is, and possibly where she is?"

"No, no," answered L'Estrange. "Remember that we have all two sets of grandparents. Traseaden Hall comes to me from my mother's mother. Madame Valdez claims to be the sister of my father."

"I see. Well, we shall probably unravel the matter no further to-night, and we both want a little time to think over the curious things that have come to light," said Oakley.

"Quite so," answered L'Estrange. "Thinking may do more good than talking; but before we have done, there is one question—one most essential to my peace of mind—which I wish to put to you. If I can make good what I have said regarding

Madame Valdez and the duel, is there a chance that Miss Adair will receive me again into favour?"

"I want no making good, my dear fellow. Your assurance is quite enough for me. As to what my niece, whose feelings have been deeply wounded, may require, I had rather not speak. My belief is that her own heart will be your best advocate when your conduct may be shown to have been blameless in point of constancy."

"Thanks, thanks," answered L'Estrange, as he took the sailor's hand; "you give me new life. Traseaden Hall has already acquired a value in my eyes which it had not when you saw me viewing it this morning."

"I have not," Oakley said, "breathed a hint of having met you, nor a word about the inheritance of Traseaden. My opinion is, that I should say nothing on either subject until some attempt may have been made to fathom the mystery of these letters, and to trace the Valdez woman. I will furnish you with her former address."

"I concur," L'Estrange answered. "Much as my patience costs me, I would refrain from saying anything at present. I will now put you in possession of my solicitor's address at Growcester, and tell you where I am to be found in London. I trust that we shall now hear more of each other than we have heard for some months past. But now that I hope there is no longer mistrust between us, let me ask you about your own affairs. I know that you are married, of course; but——"

Here L'Estrange, as they took some refreshment together, found out some points of Oakley's history, which have been already noticed in these pages. It was not very early when they parted, and Oakley had to stimulate his post-boy by the promise of an increased gratuity if he got him into Veorse before midnight. Late as it was, he enjoyed his drive through the darkness greatly. His friend L'Estrange was already acquitted by him of disloyalty. He saw, as he thought, Doris's happiness secured, while, by this astounding devolution of Traseaden Hall, the secret ambition of every one of the house of Clowance was like to be gratified.

Traseaden, however, had so often shown itself to be a *mirage* to the Clowances, that, until they should have it fast in the family, it would be better not to speculate on it.

CHAPTER XL

THE SENHORA VALDEZ.

Between the long stages of pondering into which these strange revolutions lured Oakley, he snatched some minutes to think over his own arrangements, the near approach of the day for his return to Plymouth, preparatory to going to sea, making it necessary that he should carefully apportion his time to his duties. In cutting out his work for the days succeeding that of his drive to Mathwick, he determined that, although Mrs Salusbury would return next day, it would be unfair to intrude on her until she should have had at least one night's rest in Traseaden Hall.

He therefore devoted the next day to some leave-takings, intending to go on the next but one once more to Traseaden Hall. But another arrangement was more pleasing to the gods. While in the morning he was being required as umpire to decide on which of several new bonnets—presents to Una since the arrival of Master Oakley—should be worn for that day's visiting, and while he was grievously perplexed between the Leghorn with the primrose trimmings, and the sweet lavender with the ostrich feathers and gold tassels (for all but two candidates had by this time, after exhaustive discussions, been eliminated from the competition)—even then, while, solicited by merits on either hand, his mind hung suspended in distressing hesitation, arrived a note from the Hall, informing him that Mrs Dunstan Salusbury had returned home the night before, some hours sooner than she had at first proposed, that she had been informed of his being in Veorse, and that she requested him, if possible, to come and see her that day on business which she represented as very urgent.

The round of visits was postponed, which was very fortunate, as there was no longer need to decide, without fullest consideration, between the two delightful bonnets; and Oakley, after all, found himself in the afternoon at the door of Traseaden Hall.

"Madam Salusbury desires that you will walk in, sir," was the ready answer to his inquiries, and he was forthwith ushered, not into the dimly lighted room which had been the scene of his former interview, but into an apartment where his eyes could perform their office without any preparation. In a chair, opposite to a window, sate the mourning lady. She rose as her guest approached; and so startled was the sailor on beholding

her, that he could with difficulty steady himself to go through his first salutation, and to take the hand which she offered him.

"I wished, Captain Oakley, to lose no time before thanking you for the great kindness you showed in coming to me at the time of our last sad meeting. I was unable to say then all I felt."

When he heard her voice, now uttering its natural tones, Oakley became only more and more discomposed. The lady, however, did not show that she noticed this, but politely requested him to be seated.

"You have, as I know," said she, "had some account of my last great trouble. My younger son died soon after I reached Paris. Thanks to you, I was by his bedside at the last. My misfortunes have indeed been great of late."

"Without doubt," answered Oakley, "you have been much afflicted, madam, and I sincerely pity your sufferings. I think you have a stout heart, and hope that you will have strength and courage to ride through the storm."

"I trust so," was the answer. "But, Captain Oakley, permit me to remark that since you entered something in the room seems to have shocked or astonished you. Will you kindly say what it is by which you are influenced, and I will, if I can, put you at your ease?"

"I beg pardon, madam, for letting you see that I am at all *distract*," answered the sailor. "We don't study much the concealment of our feelings on board of ship, and I fear that I have allowed what I feel myself to be more evident than what I feel for you. But, believe me, I do sympathise very heartily with your grief, and have come here to-day to express my concern, and to ask whether I can in any way serve you."

"I have not the least doubt of it, sir. But let me ask again, do you feel here any perplexity which I can remove?"

"My answer shall be very frank, madam. Now that I see you plainly—you will remember that when before you honoured me with an interview it was in a darkened room—now that I see you plainly, I am reminded so forcibly of a lady with whom I once had some acquaintance, and who, indeed, took a passage in my ship, that I am unable to control my surprise, which every time you move or speak becomes greater and greater."

"I fear that I am more artificial than honest sailors; but I own that I, too, have a consciousness of having met you in days that are past. It cannot, I think, be a dream."

"Can you recall any circumstance of a supposed former meeting?"

"Oh, I think so. I think I can remember being seated opposite you, very much as I am now, only that we were both in the cabin of a little vessel, whose name is now connected with a most gallant sea-fight—the Aiguille. I remember that you were clad in uniform, while I was—not in these sad garments."

"You—you *are* Madame Valdez, then! How extraordinary! I thought I could not be——"

"No. I am Madam Salusbury. That is, and was, my right name, though I have often gone by another."

"You are my former acquaintance?"

"I am so. I resumed my place in my late husband's family after my return from Spain."

"And you, of course, knew me when I was here before?"

"You are right. I did, of course, know you. But there were reasons then—family reasons—why I could not be too prompt in recalling some passages in my life. Those reasons, alas! are no longer of any force. There is no one but my unhappy self now to be injured or benefited by a revelation of my adventures."

"Why, you hardly know, Mrs Salusbury, how curious it is that I should recognise you just at the present time. It was only last night that Colonel l'Estrange and myself were speaking earnestly of you, and assuring ourselves that you would be able to rescue him from the effects of a slander which has been allowed to circulate, much to his detriment."

"Indeed! do you tell me that Frederic l'Estrange is anywhere near us?"

"I imagine him to be at present increasing his distance from us as rapidly as possible. It is nevertheless true that he was at Mathwick last night."

"How strange!" answered she. "It was only last night that I wrote urging him to come hither without delay. I thought I should have something unexpected to tell you with regard to his fortunes. He has probably himself told you that he is now the owner of this house and estate."

"He has told me. My surprise was very great at first; it has somewhat abated now. From the terms in which you speak, I imagine that his claim will not be disputed."

"There is none to dispute it," answered Mrs Salusbury sadly. "Unless some one could appear nearer than he in blood to a former Sir Wolsey Salusbury, by whose will the property is entailed, or unless his descent from Sir Wolsey's sister can be contradicted, Frederic must succeed. For my part, I would not wish things otherwise. L'Estrange is my relation, the nearest,

probably, that I now have. I have told him that I believe there is not the slightest chance of his right being questioned."

"As you are so soon to see L'Estrange, madam, I will leave it to him to ask from you some information which is necessary to clear him of an imputation which has been made against him. I had intended, if ever I should meet again with my old acquaintance, Madame Valdez, to ask for it myself, but it will now be unnecessary for me to speak."

"You mean Frederic's duel, and the silly construction that was put upon it. Of course, my word will be altogether contradictory of the scandal."

"You have obliged me by saying so much. His own word was enough for me; but as he will wish to satisfy others, who will require, perhaps, corroborative testimony, I am delighted to hear that you will be a witness in his favour."

"Indirectly Frederic has been of great assistance to me even lately. His friend, Colonel Perrin—indeed, the officer who so kindly apprised you of my dear son's dangerous illness—was unremitting in his attentions both to the patient and to me. I cannot speak too highly of them."

They talked a little about Spain and their voyage, the lady saying that to do so gave her a little respite from her cares. When about to take leave, Oakley said that he was much pleased at having been favoured with this interview, because he must leave for the coast in a day or two, and then proceed to sea. On this Mrs Salusbury spoke in the kindest terms of his niece, Miss Adair, without, however, showing the slightest consciousness of the relations which had existed between Doris and L'Estrange, but only regarding her as having been beloved by her lost son Chatham.

"Even after my dear elder son's death," she said, "I still thought Traseaden Hall would be my home, and I hoped to receive here Miss Adair and her relations. But, alas! I have no home now. I know not where I may make my home, nor whether I may have a home at all."

This is the sum of what was worth recording in their conversation. She dismissed Oakley with the expression of the very best wishes for his future success, and of gratitude for old and recent good offices.

He, for his part, went from her with a sort of idea that an age of wonders and surprises had commenced, that an ordinary work-a-day issue was not to be expected longer from any conjuncture of events, and that romance and reality would be henceforth one and the same thing.

As if it were not enough that Fred l'Estrange should, by a

stroke of the enchanter's wand, have become lord of Traseaden, here was now Mrs Salusbury identified with that very Madame Valdez, the finding of whom had lately seemed to him so desirable, and at the same time so little to be hoped for! He felt certain now that L'Estrange would effectually clear his character, and re-establish himself in Doris's good opinion. About the forgery of the letters, and the diabolical practices which had been resorted to to wreck L'Estrange's happiness, he could not venture to trouble a lady in so deep distress as Mrs Salusbury, but he trusted that L'Estrange would find an opportunity of mentioning these things to her, and of hearing any suggestion which she might think proper to make in regard thereto.

Loyal and true himself, Oakley was fully persuaded of every word which L'Estrange had told him, and, so far as he was himself concerned, he already looked upon his friend as one whose character was sufficiently re-established to entitle him to appear once more in Miss Clowance's house as Doris's suitor. But his belief, though it might go a long way towards satisfying others, would not, he knew, convince the person principally concerned, neither could it put down the scandal which had been allowed to spread itself far and wide. He did not, therefore, dare even now to say a word of the astonishing things which he had learned, until L'Estrange should be ready to come forward with his proofs.

In the meantime, what (to his dearest ones, mighty) facts was he obliged to suppress! L'Estrange would surely appear before the day on which he must leave; if not, he must, under the seal of confidence, let gentle Una know of the wondrous things which fate was evolving. Wondrous they indeed were. And not least astonishing was the truth that those very events which had seemed to shatter the last chance of a Deane ever again owning Traseaden Hall, had been the truest guides to the restoration of the Deane interest therein. Whatever outside people may have thought during Sir Chatham Salusbury's short life, Oakley knew well that the chance of Doris accepting him was infinitely small, while the present owner, once assoilzied of charges of which there now seemed to be ample means to clear him, would scarcely have to ask her twice.

One thing which Oakley took care to do without loss of time, was to write to L'Estrange telling him of his having lighted so curiously upon Madame Valdez, and of the character in which he found her; bidding him also (as it was understood that Mrs Salusbury had summoned him to Traseaden Hall) to lose no time in presenting himself, as he (Oakley) could not remain more than a day or two at farthest at Veorse; and he did not

feel at liberty to say a word of the discoveries which he had lately made, until L'Estrange should be ready with Madame Valdez's evidence, to clear up the mystery entirely, and once for all.

Oakley thought, too, that as a correspondence had been commenced between himself and Colonel Perrin, it might be well to write and beg that officer to consult his memory, and get together as clear a recollection as possible of the circumstances attending Madame Valdez's visit to L'Estrange's quarters in Spain, and the duel which ensued. He could not, of course, say anything to Perrin about L'Estrange's love affair as a reason why evidence might be wanted, but he saw no impropriety in saying that, in all probability, L'Estrange would be proved to be the heir of the property left by Sir Wolsey Salusbury. Perrin would be likely to imagine that the visit of the lady in Spain had some reference to property, and so would not ask questions about why the subject of the duel was to be discussed again. At any rate, he would be ready, if wanted, to bear witness that he had turned out of his quarters in order that the lady might be accommodated. He wrote to Perrin accordingly.

But although information travelled and L'Estrange moved with exceeding rapidity for those days, it is certain that L'Estrange did not make his appearance before the hour when Oakley felt compelled to leave. Oakley hoped to the last that his friend would turn up; but when his last evening arrived without fulfilment of the hope, he proceeded to make over to his wife all the stunning facts with which he was charged. That staid little person heard the astonishing story with the placidity that was habitual with her. She did not exclaim nor exult aloud, but only said softly, "I did not think it would all have been put right so soon. And Traseaden too! That news I did not expect at all."

The mystery came very opportunely to occupy Una, and keep her from giving up her mind to grief at parting with her husband. The hour of his departure sounded, the chaise came to the door, and, amid the general mourning of the household, the honest sailor departed, Una holding up baby in a window which commanded the road for some way, in order that Oakley, if he looked back, might catch a last glimpse of the little figure. He did not fail to look back more than once, and baby crowed and kicked at the moments of those retrospects.

"I am sure the little darling understands," said Una. "I can't be deceived about his amazing intelligence, whatever other people may be."

"Of course he understands," said Eleanor, as she wiped her eyes. "He's trying to tell us now, only he can't speak plainly." And Eleanor may have been right, for a lengthened spluttering did, when she spoke, proceed from the heir of Oakley; and who should say that it was not his method of expressing his sympathy with the universal regret!

CHAPTER XII

L'ESTRANGE SPEAKS FOR HIMSELF.

Oakley had been gone three days. In another day a letter from him might be expected. But a day, which used to pass so quickly, took now a long time to get through. The ladies were sitting after luncheon. Baby had been duly idolised in the morning, and was now asleep. The county paper had fortunately been brought in, and it might help them over a heavy half-hour. It was generally Doris's part to run over the paragraphs in the sheet, and to call attention to matter of interest. "Signor Blitz, the great conjuror," announced Doris, "has been delighting a distinguished circle at Cookwort-in-the-Mire for several nights. On Friday his performance will be under the patronage of the Worshipful the Mayor. The newspaper thinks that his skill exceeds that of any necromancer that has ever visited these parts."

A few remarks from the company for Signor Blitz, and then Doris read again: "We understand that it has been decided by the Lords of the Admiralty to keep afloat only the very smallest number of ships that can perform the indispensable naval duties. Economy has been pressed very persistently on all the military departments. The paper hopes that it may not be carried too far."

"That means placing a number of officers on half-pay," said Una. "They will not like it, however economical it may seem to the public."

"Fall of a thunderbolt in the eastern extremity of the Furze Range. It has been matter of doubt of late years whether any solid body was ever actually discharged from the clouds, and whether a thunderbolt did not really mean a stroke of the lightning. But the recent occurrence in our neighbourhood would seem to set the question at rest, as a large body, as big

as a millstone, came down with immense force, buried itself in the ground, and was afterwards extracted by the efforts of two labourers, who were employed seven hours in the exhumation. *N.B.*—The bolt is now in the yard of the Furze Bush Inn in Growcester, and may be seen by paying sixpence for admission."

"I never had a doubt about the reality of thunderbolts," Dorothy said. "One fell in the gardens at Sentfield when I was a child, and everybody went to see it. I can remember quite well the way it was talked about wherever you went."

On this followed a series of inquiries about the thunderbolt, which were terminated only by Doris exclaiming, "Look here!" and then proceeding to read as follows:—

"We understand that the Traseaden Hall property, which was lately the centre of much sad interest in consequence of dire misfortunes in the Salusbury family, will now pass to a distant cousin bearing another name. The new squire is, we are told, a military officer of rank and distinction, in the prime of life, and unmarried."

"Really! who can it be?" said Miss Clowanca. "I know very little about the Salusbury family, but I believe they are numerous."

"It will not be long till we hear the name," said Eleanor. "In the prime of life and unmarried. Well, Doris, my dear, Traseaden Hall will still be in want of a mistress."

"Don't, aunt Eleanor, if you please," begged Doris. "I am weary of the thought of a young man from Traseaden Hall. This captain, or whatever he is, may probably never know us at all. I am sure I hope that he won't. If he does come here, I shall never look at him."

"My life on it, you do," put in Una.

"Why, how can you?" answered Doris. "I am sure you know as well as any one how unjust it is to speak so. It isn't a kind of joke that I like at all."

"My dear, I am not joking," returned Una. "I am perfectly serious, and willing to venture something on my foresight. What do you say to a wager now? I am ready to bet a parasol, or a pair of the new-fashioned clogs, or a down tippet (whichever you please), against a coral and bells (I am sure baby is beginning to feel his teeth), that you don't turn your back on the new squire, and that you do receive him favourably."

"I shall leave the room if you go on so," said Doris.

"Una, don't tease her," said Dorothy.

"Sister, I am completely in earnest, I assure you," Una answered. "I will have a wager with you or with sister Eleanor, if you like. Tell me in a fortnight's time whether I have been joking."

This wasn't like Una's usual manner, but then it was delightful to see her in spirits at all. They had been really quite anxious as to how the loss of her husband would affect her, and it was a relief to see her a little gay. It would not do to check her animation, but it was unfortunate that she had taken this fancy to make fun of poor Doris.

After thoughts like these had made them silent for a minute or two, Eleanor said, by way of changing their ideas, "Those left-hand neighbours really cause us much annoyance. They have quarrelled with the tradespeople in Veorse, so that everything they have comes from a distance, and there is a cart continually driving to or from the door: butcher's cart, baker's, laundress's, brewer's, grocer's, and I know not what besides. It makes one quite nervous. I hear one of them just stopped at the door."

Before any further remark could be elicited, a quick, decided skip was heard on the steps outside, and an alarum, in the shape of an elaborate knock at the door, resounded through the house.

"Dear me! It must have been here!"

"Who can it be?"

These words had hardly been uttered in chorus when the door opened, and Mrs Salusbury from Traseaden Hall was announced.

Thereupon entered a lady of graceful carriage and prepossessing appearance, dressed in deep mourning.

"I do not know which lady I ought to address as Miss Clowance," said the new-comer, with a melancholy smile, and hesitatingly putting forth her hand for acceptance by somebody.

Miss Clowance, sympathetically moved, came forward and took the hand, after which she presented the other three members of the party.

"I know you all at second hand," said Mrs Salusbury, sadly. "I had hoped to become personally acquainted with you under happier circumstances. But (gently) we will not talk of them. Had Captain Oakley been at home, I should have encountered one personal acquaintance."

It was explained that Captain Oakley had left for Plymouth. "Dear me, I am so sorry," said the widow, "not only to have missed seeing him, but also to have lost his aid (which I know

that I should have received) in regard to a matter of which I will speak directly, and which is indeed the cause of my visit."

Inquiries as to health and condolences ensued, after which the visitor said—

"I owe so much to Captain Oakley's kindness, that I am especially glad to make the acquaintance of his wife. Miss Adair I have often longed to see, and now that I do see her, I find her all that she has been described to me." Here the voice sank so as to be inaudible, but presently the lady resumed, "May I ask, Miss Adair, that you will receive me as an old friend—indeed I wish to act a friendly part towards you."

And she rose and approached Doris, who also rose, when Mrs Salusbury kissed her affectionately, and then resumed her seat. Doris then spoke of the beautiful necklace, and of the value which she set upon it, and Mrs Salusbury said pleasant things in reply. Then turning to Una, she said—

"I said that I had been much indebted to Captain Oakley, but probably you did not understand how much I meant by that remark. I included in it, of course, recent kindnesses and attentions, but it is also a fact that the Captain gave me a passage home from Spain in his ship the *Aiguille*, which he fought so gallantly afterwards.

"Yes," she went on, "I was in Spain, through what odd circumstances I will not now detail, or I should tire you. I was there, and the disturbed state of the country compelled me to bear there an assumed name. I was known as the *Senhora Valdez*."

Doris uttered an exclamation, and half rose from her chair.

"Be calm, my dear, I entreat you. I have more to say which will not, I think, distress you. My appearance, and my time of life, must, I should think, of themselves be a sufficient refutation of my having been engaged in an affair of gallantry. Moreover, the officer whose name was unfortunately connected with mine is a near relation—my nephew, I say, though he is not quite satisfied of that. Be that as it may, I am here to say that the whole story, though it rested upon undoubted facts, was the merest slander as regarded my relative—may I mention his name?—well then, as regarded Colonel l'Estrange. I find that he has not only been maligned as to this matter, but that he has been imposed upon as to other things very momentous to him, and that his letters of explanation were intercepted, and never reached those for whom they were intended."

Here she paused, and Mrs Oakley, taking up her parable,

said: "My husband only waited for Mrs Salusbury's explanation, which, as he knew, would shortly be given, to say that he is now thoroughly convinced that Colonel l'Estrange has never been otherwise than loyal and true. He had been supplied with the proofs of these things, and had hoped to exhibit them himself. When he went he entrusted them to me. I have heard the whole story from him, and am thoroughly convinced, as he is, that Colonel l'Estrange has completely cleared himself of the aspersions against his fidelity, and that he is most anxious to plead his own cause in this house, and to obtain his acquittal."

"That is it," said Mrs Salusbury; "we will not speak at present of anything further than Colonel l'Estrange being allowed to plead his own cause. I have not the least doubt that he will plead it effectually, and after his peace has been made, he may probably have some further disclosure to make, which he would not wish to mention while he is waiting for the verdict."

"Felix is entirely for giving him a hearing," said Una. "So am I. Does any one dissent?"

Nobody answered for a minute. They all looked at Doris, who was trembling so that she could not speak. At length Miss Clowance said—

"I see no reason why he may not be allowed to speak for himself."

"That is well," said Mrs Salusbury; "he is in my carriage at the door. May he come in?"

Una ran to Doris, who was fainting. She and Eleanor took her from the room.

"I have been precipitate," said Mrs Salusbury, "though not without reason, as I hope you will admit when all is told. The news which has overcome our young friend will also work her cure. Now that you may be alone with him, Miss Clowance, will you admit Colonel l'Estrange? I assure you that the reasons which might formerly have counselled you to object to such a course, have now disappeared."

"Yes, I will see him," said Miss Clowance, not quite certain that she was right, but hardly perceiving how she could refuse.

"Then I will send him, and at the same time take my leave for to-day. The Colonel will have much to say; and, as he will explain to you, my stay in this neighbourhood will now be short, and I have many matters to arrange."

And Mrs Salusbury bade a most kind adieu to Dorothy, who was not quite clear that she was awake. She had, however, little time to reflect on her own condition, for in less than two minutes Colonel l'Estrange was announced, and her old

acquaintance, now hardened into manhood, but with the same features, and the same pleasing expression which had been his in former days, stood before her, and came forward, saying—

“Miss Clowance, how I rejoice to enter your house once more, and to see you alive and well by your hearth!”

Dorothy gave him her hand, and said: “I am glad to see you here safe, Colonel l'Estrange, after all your dangers and successes. I have been for some time persuaded that I was never to have that pleasure again.”

“It is to explain what must have appeared to you as my heartless and neglectful conduct that I am here at this moment. Let me say, in one word, that the story of my love affair in the Peninsula was the merest fiction, as I shall be able to show you by evidence. Then, as to my long silence, or apparent silence, I received letters purporting to come from Oakley and Miss Adair——”

Miss Clowance started, and began, “Neither of them ever, I am certain——”

“Pardon my interrupting you, dear lady,” said l'Estrange. “I saw Captain Oakley a day or two since, and ascertained from him that the letter written in his name is a forgery, and that he believes the other to be so too. We shall, I hope, be able to obtain the reputed writer's opinion as to that. I wrote again fully in reply. My letter, as I now find, was never received by Captain Oakley, to whom it was addressed. Lastly, I was altogether discouraged from making a further attempt to renew acquaintance with your family by another unfortunate letter. I met Oakley by accident, had with him explanations, with which, I believe, he is perfectly satisfied, and learned from him, to my inexpressible delight, that clear proof of what I had told him was all that was necessary to restore to me the privilege of entering your door again and resuming friendly relations with your family.”

“I was prepared for what you have said,” answered Miss Clowance, “by what has been said on your behalf by Mrs Salusbury and also by Mrs Oakley, who spoke for her husband.”

“Then a prospect of happiness is once more opening before me. You do not know, Miss Clowance, I hope that you never may know, anything like the misery which I have endured for more than two years. And now let me inquire concerning the other members of your household.”

But at this juncture two of the members, Una and her baby, appeared on their own behalf. Una was most cordial in her reception, and wanted to hear no explanation. Her husband

was entirely satisfied, as she said, and she was satisfied too, and convinced that he had never faltered in his allegiance. "No, I don't want argument," said Una, "I want you to look at my little treasure. Did you ever see such a darling baby in your life?"

"Indeed she is a darling," said L'Estrange. "Will you trust me to hold her?"

"She!" echoed Una with an emphasis which she had not used ten times in her life. "He calls my little man, my little hero, my little sailor, *She!* Oh, was the boy insulted? did his little heart swell? 'Do I look like a little girl?' says he. 'How could anybody think of taking me for a girl,' &c.?"

L'Estrange disentangled himself from this grave heresy to which he had inadvertently committed himself, and solemnly condemned and abjured the same. The little wrangle gave time to Miss Clowance to think rapidly over the situation, and to consider what should now be done.

"I think, Colonel L'Estrange," said she, "that, if you do not object, we should fix a time for my brother and sisters and myself to hear at length the explanation which you desire to offer."

"I only object," answered he, "to any loss of time that can possibly be avoided. I hope, moreover, that I am not wrong in supposing that all of your house desire to decide on my case as speedily as is consistent with a thorough investigation and understanding of it. Therefore I have in this paper set down the principal part of what I have to say, and appended some documents to support my statements. The papers, aided by what Mrs Oakley has learned from her husband, and what you have heard from Mrs Salusbury, will, I hope, be sufficient to set me right in your opinion, and I shall be ready to answer any question that may tend to further clearness."

"Nothing could be more reasonable," Dorothy said. "We will consider the matter forthwith, and inform you——"

"Nay, madam, if you permit me, I will call in the evening for my information. I flatter myself that by that time you will understand my representation, save for any little point that I may have omitted."

"Yes," said Miss Clowance, "it is only fair that we should be as quick as possible. As far as I can now see, your proposal is quite satisfactory."

"This evening, then, about seven, shall we say? I shall count the minutes till I am in this room again."

And the soldier withdrew.

"You need have no fear, sister," said Una to Miss Clowance.

"I know the story pretty well, and am sure that everything will be satisfactory."

"Heaven send it prove so! What an extraordinary thing! How thankful I shall be for that poor child!" said Dorothy, as she absently sank into a chair, and put her hand to her forehead.

CHAPTER XIII

ACQUITTED AND TAKEN TO THE HEART.

To sit down quietly was more than L'Estrange was equal to; therefore, as the day was fair, he walked away into the country, and tried to interest himself in reviewing some of the spots and landscapes with which he had been familiar in his sketching days more than three years ago. There they were much as he had left them, many a one suggestive of some passage more or less interesting in that part of his career. The features of the ground had scarcely changed in the time that had elapsed; but in him and his fortunes, what a difference! He had been then an obscure subaltern; now he was an officer of some rank and mark, even among the distinguished men who had served in those eventful days. He had been personally noticed by His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief of the army, who had been pleased to say that he was proud of him as his godson. He had been preferred to a good appointment, and was in the way of rising to the top of his profession.

But stranger than anything that had happened, and more in the way of pure luck, was the possession of Traseaden. He remembered traversing the grounds, and sketching some of the features; but at that time he had not the faintest idea that any natural chain of circumstances could have made him the proprietor of these acres and this Hall. Now that the great shadow of his life appeared disposed to pass away, he could perceive how much he had to be thankful for; and he did feel thankful for his preservation in so many dangers, and the success which had blessed his honest and hearty endeavours. By thoughts of this kind he seasoned his impatience until night fell upon the landscape. After that there was a weary time to wait, but he got through it by the aid of newspapers at the inn, and some pleasant reveries, in which Doris figured as the mistress of Traseaden.

As seven struck from the church tower he was at Miss Clowance's door, a great deal more anxious than ever he had felt on going into action with the enemy. The servant who admitted him smiled as she did so; and this, he thought, was a good augury, for she had probably managed in some way to know the feeling in the house concerning him. But he had little time to think of omens before he was in Miss Clowance's presence, and she to-day was his fate.

"Good evening, Colonel l'Estrange," said Dorothy, holding out her hand; "it is peace and friendship from all of our side. Is that satisfactory? You would rather, I think, that I came to that point at once."

He seized the old lady's hand and kissed it; then for a minute or so stood holding it unable to speak; but he soon overcame his emotion, and made an answer in every way reciprocating the goodwill which had been expressed. Nor was he long before he mentioned Miss Adair's name, and asked when he might have the happiness of seeing her.

"She is in the next room, and will receive you there if you wish," answered Miss Clowance.

It is unnecessary to record l'Estrange's answer. The old lady went with him into Doris's presence, and having said, "Doris, my dear, here is Colonel l'Estrange," withdrew; and nobody will doubt that she withdrew unperceived.

The papers from which this narrative is compiled contain some account of the meeting of Doris and l'Estrange, but this account has not been here transcribed, because a reader of any sensibility will have no difficulty in imagining it; because also people so situated, however joyous they may be themselves, do not present themselves in the best phases for the limner, and one would rather contemplate this admirable couple in their most impressive aspect.

The room in which they were now together was the same in which their parting had taken place in 1813, and that circumstance no doubt intensified the feelings with which they met again. From the manifestation of those feelings, strangers have been requested to withdraw, but on the return of our reporter he found Miss Adair requesting to be informed how Mrs Salusbury could possibly have been in the English camp in Spain, to which Colonel l'Estrange replied—

"We have all something to learn on that head. That she was there, there can be no manner of doubt. She has had so much to say to me on other subjects, and there has been so short a time to say it in, that I have yet to hear what she may choose to say about her personal history."

"I have read," said Doris, "that she is not to have Traseaden Hall. A military officer of rank is said to be now the owner. Have you any idea who it is?"

"Yes, I have some idea. For want of a better master for it, I believe that I am the man."

Doris looked at her lover. "Don't joke, Frederic," she said. "Though I am very happy, I feel as if the least thing would make me cry."

"Dearest, I would not joke with you to-night," answered he. "It is simply true that, through my grandmother having been sister to the late Sir Chesterfield Salusbury, the house and estate have come to me. They are part of the worldly goods with which I hope shortly to endow——"

"Stop a moment; stop, if you would not see me quite lose my head. This has been a day of such surprises! Everything has come so suddenly."

"You should have been prepared for this as well as for other intelligence, my darling, only that, until my peace was assured on other grounds, I could not put forward what might look like a bribe."

"And my aunts do not know of this?"

"I think not. Mrs Oakley may have heard it from her husband; but I am pretty sure that it has not been told to her sisters."

"O Frederic, you do not know, you can scarcely imagine, what excitement the news will cause in this house! We—that is, my family—are nearly allied to the old owners of Traseaden Hall, the Deanes. Everything connected with the old place rouses interest within these walls, and now to think that you—you—are its possessor!"

Hereupon followed a few explanations, during the giving of which Doris in some sort realised the fact of L'Estrange's proprietorship, and soon she said—

"I don't think I ought to withhold this information from my dear aunts even for half an hour. I must go and tell them." And she went.

The tyrant, it seems, worn out with oppressions and cruelties, was by this time asleep in his nursery; and the three sisters were together in the drawing-room, taking advantage of the lull to discuss hastily some few private affairs. It was in this discussion that they were engaged when the door opened, and Doris, much agitated, came in. There was not time to form a notion of what her coming could mean, far less to address a question to her, before Doris, catching her breath as well as she could, said—gasped would perhaps be the more proper word—

"Aunt Dorothy, Colonel l'Estrange is the military officer. Traseaden Hall belongs to him!"

"What?" said Miss Clowance, and nothing more.

"Doris, baby has won his coral and bells," said Una, who was in the secret.

Eleanor rose from her chair, and putting her hands together, said with fervour, "Justice has not quite gone out of the world!"

"Well, don't let us detain you. I will explain," said Una.

And now the tumult of feelings in the drawing-room pretty fairly equalled that in the room adjoining. The older sisters had been doing their best to banish thought of lost Traseaden from their minds, but any one who might have heard them listening to and commenting upon Una's brief tale would soon have perceived how very little had been done towards dislodging it.

L'Estrange withdrew at an early hour, and returned to the hotel, where he took up his quarters for the present; but long after his departure, and after Doris had gone, if not to sleep, to thoughts and visions that were more delicious than slumber, there were voices in Miss Clowance's drawing-room in most earnest discussion, exultation, expectation, or whatever it might be. It was past midnight before they bethought them of repose, and even then, with lighted candles in their hands, they began again, and finally had to tear themselves asunder.

Next morning came a little diversion in the form of the expected letter from Oakley. The letter, it is true, was expected, but the news it contained was not. Oakley's orders for sea had been countermanded; the ship was to be paid off, as he had been cautioned that it might; but he was not to be wholly adrift—he was to be employed on shore in introducing into the service the invention which he had examined at Cookwort-in-the-Mire, and other inventions. Joyous news this for Una, who communicates it all at length to the baby, and the baby made some noise (to express which our alphabet is not sufficiently phonetic) in reply.

Then, of course, L'Estrange made his appearance, and there were endless things to be told, and guessed, and forecast. The real authorship of those abominable forged letters was a mystery which they could in nowise penetrate. L'Estrange mentioned how both he and Oakley suspected that Mrs Salusbury might know about it; and that the fact of his being desired to address to a Portuguese house seemed to favour the supposition. Yet it was impossible to imagine what motive she could have had for assisting in, or even conniving at, such wanton wickedness. He had gone as far as possibly he could go in trying

to draw her out as to this matter. She had replied by expressing amazement and horror at the crime, and utter bewilderment as to the motive to it. But, in a manner which he thought very abrupt, she turned from the subject to say that she took the greatest interest in Miss Adair, and now that she was to be Frederic's wife, the widow, having now, alas! no child of her own, would like to endow her with a little fortune to go to her husband with. The promise of the gift followed so strangely on the discussion of the forgery, that he could not escape the idea of one being intended as compensation for the other.

Oakley was soon in Veorse once more; and again preparations for a wedding began to occupy the inmates of Miss Clowance's house. But before plans could be much more than sketched in the faintest outline, there was another old acquaintance on the scene. Colonel Perrin, on receipt of Oakley's letter, imagining that his evidence might be required to put L'Estrange in possession of his property, left Paris as soon as ever he could obtain leave of absence, and forthwith proceeded to the Furze Range. He would have done anything for his friend, one may believe; nevertheless, as it afterwards appeared, the rogue had a second motive to this journey.

Greetings had scarcely been reciprocated between him and L'Estrange, when Pat burst out with—

"Have ye got your house and your place now, Fred?"

"I believe they are safely mine. Indeed, nobody disputes my right. I am not actually in occupation."

"Ah, that's right, then. Ye've out-manceuvred the murderin' lawyers."

"The lawyers haven't been troublesome this time. It was a lawyer who first told me of my being the heir; and no other lawyer has in any way disputed my right."

"No! Sure, I thought 'twas about your legal rights that your friend Oakley told me to refresh me memory concerning the little affair ye had with that foreign blustherer in Spain, and the foregoing adventure."

L'Estrange perceived why Oakley had asked for Pat's evidence, and he replied—

"Oakley has not gone to sea. He is here, and you will probably see him to-day. I think the evidence he told you to recollect had reference to a matter of far more importance in my eyes than even my estate. But that too is settled now exactly as I wished. In fact, you behold me, Pat, the happiest of men."

"Oh, ye're the happiest of men, are ye? I can mind the

time when such a confession would have made me swear that ye were lost, body and sowl. But I've got more liber'l since I grew older, and I won't pronounce on ye till I know who's the happiest of women."

"The woman that I should like to make the happiest of her sex is also within reach. She is Oakley's niece. It isn't a new affair. Began when I went home after Salamanca."

"And now tell me, me boy, how ye came to be heir to that scapegrace of a barr'net. He was a scapegrace, Fred, though he's dead and he stood in the position of a forefather to ye."

"That is easily explained. The baronet and I—he through his father, and I through my mother—trace our lines back to a common ancestor. I, though not a near relation, am the nearest that he had left."

"By the powers, I wish I had a common ancestor, with somebody in convanient circumstances. But if I had, th' unnatural baste wouldn't die, so what would be the use? Fred, ye've the luck, me boy. Ye always had."

"Well now, it seems," said the Spalpeen, after the conversation had wandered for a while to subjects not altogether relevant to this history,—“it seems that ye didn't much want my testimony, after all; and that, except for shaking ye by the hand, and having a joke or two about ould times, I might as well have remained in foreign parts.”

"But after all, Pat, we may need your evidence, and even if we don't, we feel the kindness you've done in coming to see us. Don't for a moment imagine that your journey has been in vain."

"Well, if I thought that—— Now, look here, Fred, men haven't much time to waste in this wicked world, and now I'll tell ye that besides your business, which ye know that I'd always be proud and happy to help forward, I've a little notion of me own—sacret and riticint as the grave, ye understand."

"You with a sacret, Pat!"

"Mesilf it is, and with a sacret. Ye're aware that the late barr'net had a mother. Oakley knows her."

"I have also that pleasure. I have some acquaintance with Mrs Salusbury."

"Ah, have ye now! Then ye know that she's an amazing fine woman. Mighty well favoured even in her grief; and majestic, I should think, when she's comforted and thranquil."

"No doubt about her good figure and looka."

"And that's not all, Fred. Ye see I'd opportunities of observing that woman's mind under dreadfully trying circumstances, and, by ——, it's my opinion that she's a genius of

the very first class—fit to be Quartermaster-General, or clerk of a race-course, or Chancellor of th' Exchequer, or anything of that sort ;—a magnificent specimen of a woman."

"Clever, undoubtedly. But get on, my boy. I want to learn the secret."

"It's comin'. Well, she tould me," continued Perrin, giving way in his earnestness more and more to the rich brogue,— "she tould me, in a delightfully impressive way, that she felt mightily indebted to me for me sarvices in France ; and, be the powers, that wasn't the only thing she said. As to the manner of saying it, it beat all that ever I heard or seen in the way of dignity and benivolence. I had an aunt by marriage once that was thought to have the grace of a goddess, but I'll be shot if she could hould a candle to this one—not a bit of it."

An odd suspicion began to dawn upon L'Estrange, who, however, only made a gesture, encouraging the narrator to proceed.

"I'd have loiked to answer her tin times more affectionately than I did ; but, ye see, I thought then she'd be the mistress of the property that's come now to yirsilf, ye lucky dog, and sure 'twasn't for the like of me to be making presumptuous remarks. But when I heard that 'twas an entailed estate, and she'd maybe be left more on my own level, in the way of riches and so on, don't ye see, why, I thought perhaps she'd not look down upon a mil'tary man, though he hadn't much worldly goods."

Look down upon him ! She ! She look down upon one of the bravest of the brave in the British army—a man who had already achieved distinction, and wanted only the opportunity to earn distinction of a higher order, and wealth besides ; beyond this, as honourable a man and as true a friend as ever breathed ! She look down on him !

Such was the thought that passed through L'Estrange's mind as he paused a minute before replying to Perrin's rather startling confession.

"Do you know anything, Pat, about Mrs Salusbury's antecedents and past history ?"

"Sure, I know that she's been mother to two barr'nets, and that she's every inch a gintlewoman, and that she has brains enough to supply a whole rig'ment of men. I tell ye, Fred, I feel meself but an infant beside her in point of intilligince. Oh, she's the right sort !"

"Well, I know more about her than you do, though my information is greatly defective. She claims to be a near relation of mine."

"Ah, I knew that she'd turn out to be all right."

"She's in seclusion now, of course; and 'twould be better not to call on her until you have first informed her that you are here, and she has fixed a time for receiving you."

"What will I do,—write?"

"If you think proper; but I am to see her to-day on business, and I will tell her, if you like, that you wish to pay your respects."

"Do, Fred. I'll take it as a kindness. And she, poor thing, 'll get nothing of all that was her son's, but have to lave it all; while you, ye monsther, mane to take the ground, and the house, and the—by the by, Fred, do ye get the bar'n'tcy?"

"Oh no. That is extinct, and nobody gets it. Don't, however, look upon Mrs Salusbury as an unfortunate turned out upon the world. She won't be penniless, I can tell you."

"The heavens be praised for that! Well, Fred, get her to receive me on an early day."

CHAPTER XIV.

TITLED AND MARRIED.

Master Frederic l'Estrange spoke "without book," as they say, when he assured his friend that the title was extinct, or, rather, when he said that nobody would get it. And to prove how little he knew about the matter, it will only be necessary to refer to a scene which took place a few nights previous to the time of his speaking. It occurred at Carlton House, then the residence of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent; and the actors in it were the Prince Regent himself and his royal brother the Duke of York.

There had been an entertainment of some kind, which had lasted till far into the night. The guests had at length departed, the courtiers had withdrawn, and their two Royal Highnesses were reclining in two lounging-chairs, with, on a table between them, two empty coffee-cups and two full glasses of curaçoa.

"No, Thursday won't do," the Prince Regent was saying; "there's to be a Privy Council on that day. Some infernal difficulty about the election return for Caerlywmpthoedd; informality, or some d——d hitch."

"Has there been an election for Caerlywmpthoedd?" asked His Royal Highness the Duke of York.

"I believe so. Yes, of course there has. Don't you know it was caused by that unlucky baronet being shot, or shooting himself? What's his name? Salusbury—Sir something—you remember all about it?"

"Egad! I remember more about it than you would fancy, until I tell you my reason. Devilish odd; but a godson and namesake of mine has unexpectedly succeeded to the property of those Salusburies—two brothers dead within a few months. I'm damned glad for the youngster's luck, and wish he'd had the baronetcy too."

"Why shouldn't he have the baronetcy too?"

"Because, unfortunately, he inherits through a female—two females, I think he said—mother and grandmother. I told him I was damned sorry he was not to have the title too. Devilish fine young fellow; in the service!"

"I ask again," said the Prince Regent, who had taken a sufficiency of refreshment,—“I ask again, Frederic, why he should not have the title?"

"Because, my dear fellow, it's extinct."

"I suppose I can give it him if he's a friend of yours?"

"I'm afraid not. Honours have been flying about so since the peace, that you'd hardly induce Ministers to give any that they can withhold."

"Ministers be d——! Do you fancy, Frederic, that I can't make a godson of yours a baronet if I choose—if I choose?"

"Well, George, I doubt if you can."

"You shall see, sir. By —, you shall see!"

The princes then left the subject for that occasion. But next day the Regent, who remembered his confident language of the night before, some incident having recalled it, wrote to the Duke of York saying that he meant to do all that he had said, but that it would facilitate his action if the Commander-in-Chief were able to say something specific in favour of his *protégé*.

To this the Duke replied that, fortunately, he was able to say a great deal in favour of the new owner of Traseaden Hall, who had behaved himself well in the two great battles of Salamanca and Vittoria, and had been wounded in the former; but who had especially been noticed for his conduct at the siege of San Sebastian, where he had ignited the combustibles on the terreplein of the works, so causing the diversion which enabled our troops at last to break into the town.

Armed with this certificate, the Regent went cunningly to work, and by throwing "difficulties" in the way of a certain project of his Minister, contrived to make the latter only too

ready to oblige him as to the granting of a title. Accordingly it was granted, the Minister taking care to obtain a *quid pro quo*. Hereupon he informed his brother that the baronetcy would be revived; and asked him whether he thought now that he (the Regent) could or could not arrange these matters as he thought proper?

There was much further correspondence on the subject between the public offices, one making this objection and another making that; but the Minister had promised the Regent, and therefore all difficulties had to be overcome. The objectors saved their honour by prescribing certain terms, the only one of which that was of much importance to the recipient of the coming honour was that, as the baronetcy was to be a revival, the new man ought to take the name of the old, and become a Salusbury.

All this time L'Estrange was profoundly ignorant of what accident had been doing for him. Indeed, he was in a state of perplexity as to what should be said to Perrin concerning the extraordinary fancy which he had taken into his head. His difficulty was this—he felt bound to make his friend aware, as far as he had the power, of the character of the person whom he was willing to go and court. On the other hand, the widow had been lately particularly gracious to him, had materially assisted him in regaining his footing with the Clowances, and had, moreover, promised to endow Doris. He could not bear the thought of disparaging her in secret even to his old comrade; and yet, if he should not tell all he knew, he would have on his conscience the evil resulting from any mistake which poor Perrin might make.

Before going to Traseaden he consulted with Oakley.

"Do you think she would have him?" asked the sailor.

"I very much fear that she might," was L'Estrange's reply. "Things look as if it would suit her admirably to marry an officer of reputation and rank. I suspect that she has money."

"Then he must be warned. If you don't like telling him, can I do it?"

"It would make no difference morally whether you may do it at my instigation, or I may do it myself. By accepting your offer I should only throw over on you a disagreeable business, which I prefer to do myself, if it must be done."

"Would it be of any use to persuade her against it?"

"Perhaps," answered L'Estrange after a pause; "at any rate, I will try. It will tax my diplomacy to do it well."

But it did nothing of the sort. Shrewd people, when they see a chance of winning what they play for, will leave no trick

of peace untied ; but they recognise at once the truth of their game having become impracticable. When L'Estrange broached the subject and hinted at Perrin's design, the lady seemed quite to follow him and to penetrate his mind.

"You will hardly tell me," said he, "what you think of such a proposal?"

"I will tell you," she replied, "if you first tell me what you think of it."

"I think it unsuitable."

"Then, Frederic, it never will be."

"You give me your word?"

"Certainly. I am preparing now to leave Traseaden Hall, and what you have told me will cause me to expedite my departure. Trust me to deal with Colonel Perrin."

"When will you see him?"

"To-morrow, if he likes."

Thus this difficulty vanished. "By Jove," said Oakley, when L'Estrange reported his success, "she's a clever one! She saw at once that you could and would prevent it if she drove you to that course; so she has gracefully succumbed, and preserved the peace among us all."

Perrin had his interview, to which he went like a giant rejoicing to run his course, and from which he returned crest-fallen and miserable, with his heart more depressed than it had been when L'Estrange found him wounded, as he thought to death, in the pass of the Pyrenees.

"I hadn't to take the 'No,'" said the Spalpeen, "she let me see that 'twas no use asking; but, ah, now I'm grieved intirely. And to think how gintly and delicately she put me off! What could I have been thinking of? Sure, she'll marry a prince or a juke, and why should she look at me? By the Lord, she's a fine woman, and a clever one!"

Traseaden Hall was relinquished in a few days, during which time things had not been standing still in reference to the future of Doris and L'Estrange. Their wedding-day was fixed, and everything regarding the marriage made as sure as was possible before the actual ceremony. Perrin, his chagrin notwithstanding, consented to remain and act as best man to his friend. Colonel Stanshon and his wife promised to be present at the wedding, and everything now went merrily.

L'Estrange quietly took possession of his new house and property; and as soon as he had had things arranged a little to his liking, urged Doris to come with her relatives and visit him in his new abode. He understood from her what an event it would be to Dorothy and Eleanor to enter Traseaden Hall

again, and to enter it amid such circumstances, and, after consideration, he determined that the old ladies would desire that the event should take place with as much privacy as possible, and not amid the prattle and under the observation of an unsympathising party.

Accordingly it was arranged that Doris, accompanied by only her two aunts, who had once been familiar with the Hall, should go thither, and be received by the owner, who was now so nearly a relation. The excursion was arranged with some secrecy. The party set off from Veorse, the ladies in a carriage and L'Estrange on horseback, as if to take the air for an hour or two. When they were within a mile or two of Traseaden, the cavalier spurred forward that he might be on his threshold to welcome them.

As soon as he had left them, Eleanor's tongue was loosened. She recognised landscapes, brooks, particular trees, and lanes and hedges—once so familiar, but not seen for many and many a year. Dorothy said less, but was conscious of quite as much emotion at sight of the well-known objects. Both were in tears as the carriage rolled through the outer gates and they entered once more into the grounds, so long lost to sight, but so carefully preserved in memory.

"It was quite right," L'Estrange thought when they swept up to the main entrance, "not to have more witnesses. They would rather be alone."

He went down the steps, assisted the ladies to alight, and then gave his arms to the sisters, telling Doris that he hoped for another opportunity of making her the foremost figure in his reception. Thus they ascended to the portico, and thence passed through the door into the hall, when L'Estrange heartily bade them welcome to Traseaden Hall, to which they would never again be strangers as long as they lived.

Eleanor sobbed, and said as she could find words, "I never thought to stand here again and give the owner joy of his possession as I now do you, Frederic."

But Miss Clowance spoke in a still more solemn tone. She dried her eyes, looked around her, and said—

"I myself have seen the ungodly in great power, and flourishing like a green bay-tree. I went by, and he was gone; I sought him, and his place could nowhere be found. Keep innocence, and take heed unto the thing that is right; for that shall bring a man peace at the last."

Then the old lady took L'Estrange's two hands, and calling him Frederic, blessed him, and wished him many, many years of happiness in Traseaden Hall.

This little tribute to their feelings, and they went off cheerfully to view the accustomed galleries and chambers which indeed stood very much as they were in the old days. The old divine still looked down from over the mantelpiece in the library, and beneath him yet glittered the insignia of the first Sir Wolsey's military service. They found the rooms which they themselves used to occupy, and the apartment in which their Lady Salusbury had died, the very chair in which she sat shortly before her death, and the mysterious cupboard from which had come the ominous ticking of the death-watch. Their varied feelings no pen can describe. They went over and over, forwards and backwards, every step recalling some incident of their young days. At last, when they had really fatigued themselves, L'Estrange persuaded them to rest and take some refreshment.

Before they sat down, he told them that he had something to announce, having that morning received some startling information from London. He then went on to say that he had advices from the private secretary of his Royal Highness the Duke of York, conveying the intelligence that the Prince Regent had been pleased to make him a baronet, and congratulating him on his promotion to that dignity. He had also got the official despatch announcing the same thing from the Herald's office, and signifying also that it was considered desirable that he should take the name of Salusbury, as his Royal Highness's intention had been to revive the old title.

"Then you will be——" Eleanor was beginning, with almost a scream of delight. But Dorothy stopped her, and turning to Doris said, "My dear, you must be the first to greet Frederic by his new style."

It was a most exciting day, but it came to an end, and four very happy, if not very sleepy, heads were laid upon pillows when it was over.

Oakley, who knew of the visit, desired L'Estrange to tell him how his sisters-in-law had been affected by it, and was much pleased at the account. "They are good, high-principled women," said the sailor, "and that is no small advantage to you and to me, since they had the moulding of both Una and Doris. I don't, however, I confess, see much force in Dorothy's moral drawn from old Sir Chesterfield, though, no doubt, she did. His race has run out, it is true; but about that the old baronet would not have cared much if it had been foretold to him, and for himself the old sinner had a very good innings. And so you are to be a baronet; accept my hearty congratulations thereon, and believe that nobody rejoices at your elevation more than your old friend Oakley."

It must not be imagined that, during all the time since L'Estrange's succession began to be known, Veorse was ignorant of what was going on, and quite tranquil and unsuspecting. Little by little the facts became clear; and although the genius of the town for invention and embellishment by no means suffered in reputation by what it did on this occasion, yet the plain truth was so romantic and so astonishing that it beggared the lies—even the lies of Veorse!

Preparations for the wedding were being hurried forward, but made scant progress owing to the calls of customs and traditions, which, if they lengthened Una's ante-nuptial period seven times, protracted that of Doris by seventy times seven. But all delays of this kind come to an end, and the happy day approached when, according to the newspapers, "the renowned soldier, Sir Frederic Salusbury, was to lead his incomparable bride to the altar." There were two reasons why it was thought advisable to delay for some months the occupation of Traseaden Hall by the young couple: one was, that only lately it had been a scene of much sorrow; the other, that L'Estrange had ordered a good deal of work to be done there. So it was settled that, as Europe was now tranquil again, he would take Doris for a long tour abroad, and then, if all should go well, bring her back to the old Hall, which was to be their home.

It was the grandest wedding that had taken place for many years in the Furze Range. The love story, and its happy result, after so many vicissitudes, interested vastly the public mind, insomuch that it was the great event of the neighbourhood. Thousands came from a distance to witness it, or, at the least, to see the procession from some point or other. There was a general determination to celebrate the event. And it is a pleasure to record that it went off without a *contretemps*. The sun shone on the bride, there was a general holiday, all honour was done to the occasion, and from end to end of the district blessings were given to the bride and bridegroom.

As Doris was being led to the carriage which was to take her to church, the last person who spoke to her was Una.

"You remember, do you not, my dear, what I told you when I was leaving this house to be married? My words have come to pass. Always be courageous; always have faith."

The details of the ceremony were all recorded, and might here be transcribed; but the fear that they might be tedious has caused them to be omitted. Suffice it to say that the bride, who is said to have been beyond expression lovely, and to have been conspicuous by that grace as well as beauty which time out of mind has distinguished the ladies of the house of Deane,

wore some lace which was the mere despair of connoisseurs, and known to be the gift of Mrs Dunstan Salusbury. Also, that the two Misses Clowance were habited in the richest brocade, and bore themselves with a dignity which the reporter calls "imperial."

Colonel Perrin, at the breakfast, returned thanks for the bridesmaids in an eloquent and humorous speech. He rejoiced in the good fortune and the now realised happiness of his old and best friend L'Estrange, now Salusbury, and wished it might last for years or centuries, though for him, Perrin, there could never be any similar joy, for Fate had been unkind to him.

Doris behaved with great self-possession all through, and did not in the least break down until she fell into aunt Dorothy's arms previous to her departure. Then she suffered a little; but her husband soon put her into the carriage, and they drove away amid long-continued acclamations.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RIGHT GROOVE AGAIN—CONCLUSION.

It was four months before Sir Frederic and Lady Salusbury returned to Traseaden Hall during which period workmen were very busy there renewing and decorating. The new owner left special directions, that in case of any change which he had approved involving the removal or disturbance of any object or arrangement which the Misses Clowance would desire to retain *in statu quo*, such change was not to take place. But his reforms were not of that kind which in these days we call "heroic;" he had not the least taste for upsetting all that happened to be a little old-fashioned, and so there was little need to modify his instructions.

While the young couple are absent will be, perhaps, a convenient opportunity for saying a few words as to the subsequent fortunes of some others named in this history, who, as it is hoped, have obtained a place in the reader's goodwill.

Captain Oakley, having been withdrawn from service afloat to attend to some shore duties, did not interfere with the arrangement which had previously been made for leaving his wife and heir at Veorse for the winter. He was able often to visit them there, and it was convenient not to set up a house

until there should be some clearer indication of what his future was likely to be. He was found very useful in his new work; and so much were the authorities pleased with his reports, that, after a year or two, when the claims of the senior naval officers had been fully met, they thought the late commander of the gallant little *Aiguille* deserving of further notice, and made him a Knight Commander of the Bath.

He and Lady Oakley, and the little Oakleys (who were plural by this time), resided for some time in London; and Oakley seemed to be degenerating into a landsman, when a friend of his at "the Board," who was about to hoist his flag, suggested that he should take command of a 74, his flag-ship, in order to keep clear of "the Yellow." In this way he went to sea with a fleet that came often to an English port, so that he was never away from home for a long while. Sir Felix Oakley, according to all that can be learned, had a very prosperous career, and when the chronicle terminated, from which, in great measure, this account has been extracted, his flag was flying as that of the naval Commander-in-Chief at one of our most important ports.

The career of Mrs Salusbury is not so clearly traceable, as none of those who best knew of her doings seemed to desire to preserve a record of them. She kept her word as to giving Lady Salusbury a present of several thousand pounds soon after the marriage. Before it took place she had gone abroad to reside, and it is believed that afterwards she never made a lengthened residence in England. Three years after the death of her son, Sir Wolsey, she married an Italian nobleman, and with him, for anything that is known to the contrary, enjoyed a happy life. He died before her, and, strange to say, left her richer than he had found her. They had no child, and she no near relation; and when she died she left all her large fortune to Lady Salusbury.

No clear light was ever thrown upon the forgery of the letters. The Salusburies and their relatives always deemed her guilty, and thought that her gifts to Doris were intended as compensations for grievous wrongs. Her life was altogether mysterious, and it is improbable that any connected account of it will ever be now procurable.

Perrin was never informed of her true history. When his friends saw that he was safe from marrying her, they did not let him know of all that looked so ugly against her. He never understood that she was the person whom he had assisted to smuggle off to the *Aiguille* that night outside San Sebastian.

He was really very much grieved by her rejection of him;

and at last, to ease his heart, he got employment in India, where, through the diversion afforded by some very hard fighting, he at last managed to recover his spirits. The Spalpeen rose to be a very distinguished general. He took a wife after he was forty, but nevertheless lived to see a numerous progeny grow up about him. He and his friend Salusbury often met again after his return from the East, by which time Pat was as gay and jovial as ever he had been. It was not an uncommon thing with him, when the gentlemen sat together after dinner, to say to his old crony, "Fred, ye divil, d'ye remember that craft we put on board th' Aiguille once? Ah, ye do. Ah, Fred!"

Before he came back to England after his honeymoon tour, Sir Frederic Salusbury had retired from the active duties of the army. He could not, as he thought, be useful as a soldier and as a country gentleman both, and as there was but a small field for exertion in the former capacity, while there was plenty to do in the latter, he decided to take off his armour and to reside on his estate.

When he and his bride returned from their honeymoon excursion, they were welcomed as heartily and as generally as they had been bidden God-speed on their departure. They made their entry into Traseaden Hall amid the shouts and lusty greetings of the whole neighbourhood, while the church bells pealed a salutation again. At the door were many of those who had formed the wedding-party—Una and Oakley, Percival and his wife, and in their rich dresses, which they had worn at the wedding, and looking ten years younger than they were, the sisters Dorothy and Eleanor. To have a Deane once more mistress of Traseaden Hall, which had tantalised them so long, was to them an elixir. Like Delos smitten by the trident, the property seemed to have given over its roving, and was now securely moored in a berth that was highly satisfactory to all persons concerned.

The reunion was not celebrated by smiles and congratulations alone. There were tears in plenty, but not bitter tears; no repentance, no remorse, no regret. A long and prosperous chapter in the history of Traseaden was begun.

One of the chief endeavours of Sir Frederic Salusbury was to make his Doris's old aunts feel that as long as they should live they would always be a power in Traseaden Hall. They chose never to make it their home—that is to say, they always retained their house in Veorse; nevertheless, it would be difficult to point to any event at the Hall which occurred when they, or one of them, was not present. Several notable events

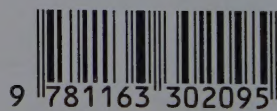
there were, of which the dates have been all accurately preserved, which refer to occasions when the aunts assumed absolute despotic control in the Hall—when nobody must move, or speak, or even breathe, except as they prescribed. And we find them in health and vigour at the latest recorded event. Indeed, although it is not expressly so written, there is good reason to believe that Sir Frederic Salusbury's sons and daughters all grew up about the knees of their great-aunts. Long within the memory of living men, the old ladies were rustling about the chambers of the mansion, supremely happy. Mention is made of them at the election of 1832, when Sir Frederic Salusbury was sent to Parliament as a knight of the shire; and his son, who came home distinguished from the Crimean war, was said to have been welcomed by (amongst many other relatives) two aunts of his mother, who remembered well the events of the French and American wars. Their portraits this day hang in a prominent place in the principal gallery. A visitor who may be viewing the paintings will be sure to notice the fine old forms, and will also be sure to be told in a low voice, by a modern Salusbury—

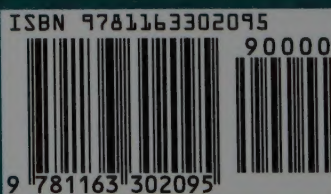
“Those are our dear old great-aunts, bless 'em. They belonged to the old branch of the Deanes, and suffered some great injustice with regard to this property. But it all came right at last. Our mother, Lady Salusbury, you know, is by descent a Deane.”

THE END.

La Vergne, TN USA
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